This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

https://books.google.com

Princeton University Library
32101 059983732

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Major-General Sir A. H. Russell, K.C.B., K.C.M.G.

[*Frontispiece.*

Digitized by Google

Three Years with the New Zealanders. By Lt.-Col. C. H. Weston, D.S.O., LL.B. (N.Z.)

LONDON: SKEFFINGTON & SON, LTD., 34, SOUTHAMPTON STREET, STRAND, W.C.2

Publishers to His Majesty the King.

Digitized by Google

14094
.199
.96

Dedication

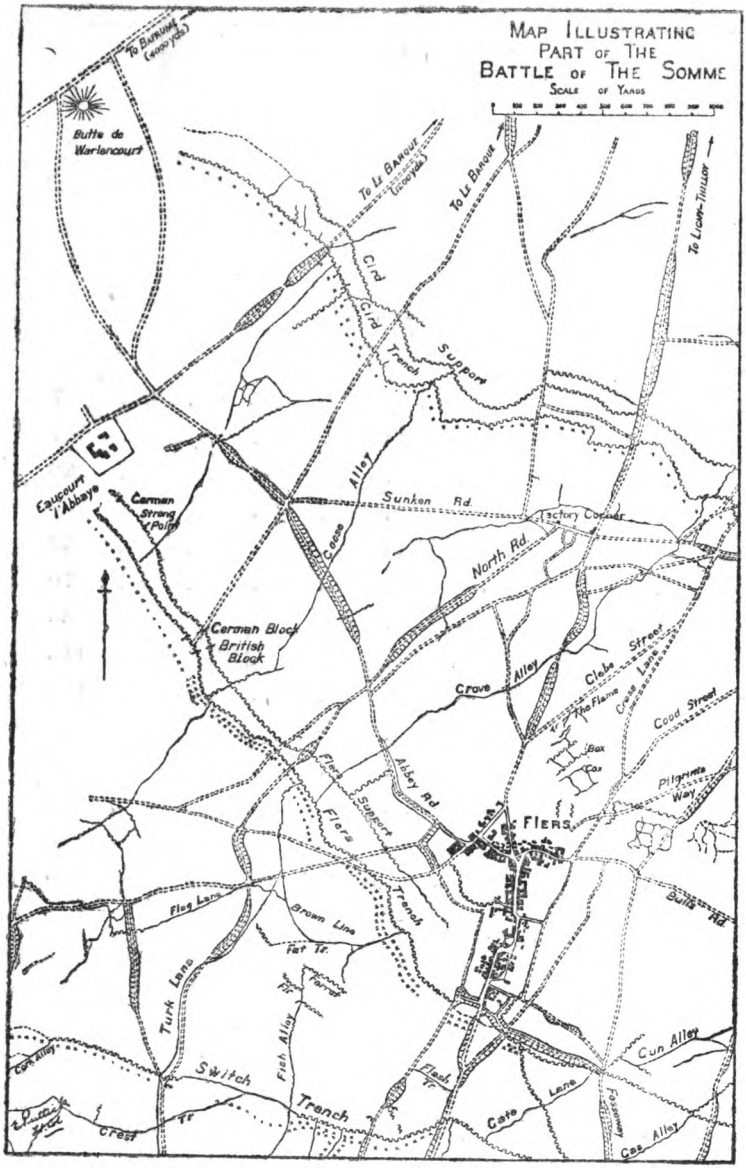
"To my Fellow Worker in making this Book—
My Wife."

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

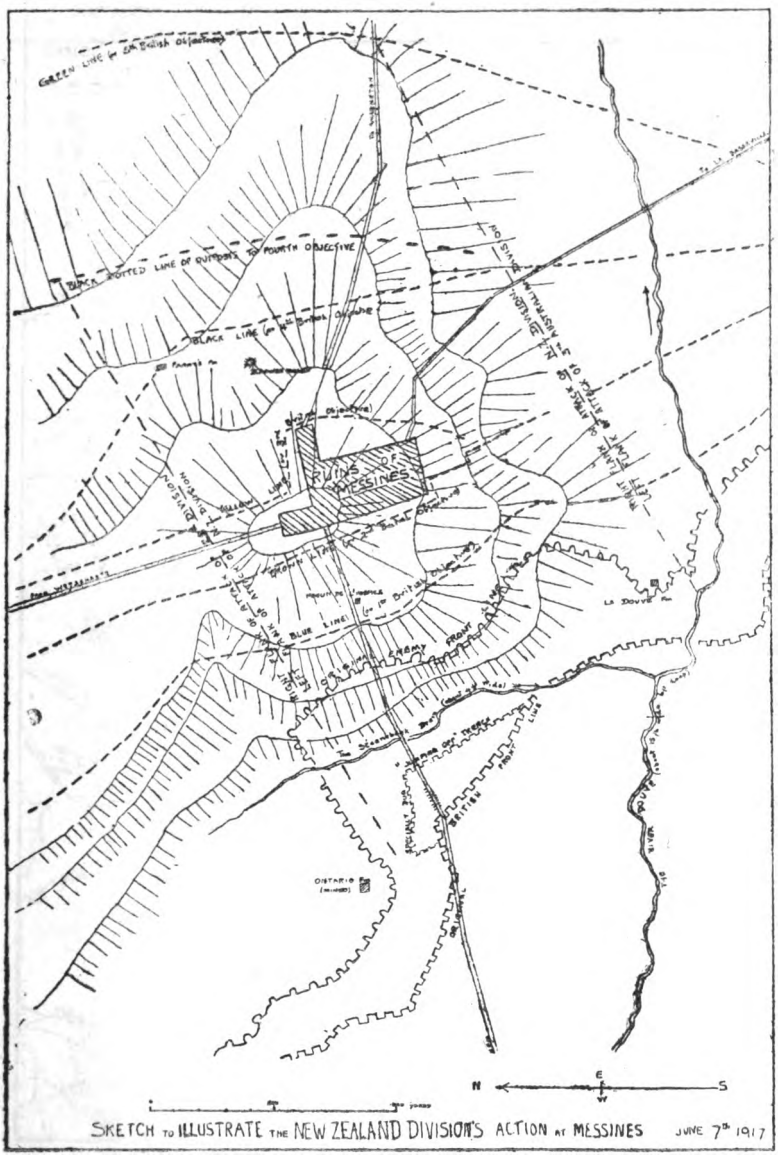
CHAP.		PAGE
I.	Training in New Zealand	7
II.	New Zealand to Lemnos	17
III.	Lemnos	29
IV.	Gallipoli	39
V.	Winter in Egypt	53
VI.	Flanders	70
VII.	The Somme	88
VIII.	Sailly	116
IX.	Aldershot	130
X.	Messines	140
XI.	La Basse Ville	174
XII.	Passchendaele	212
XIII.	Hospital	233
XIV.	The New Zealander	246

Digitized by Google



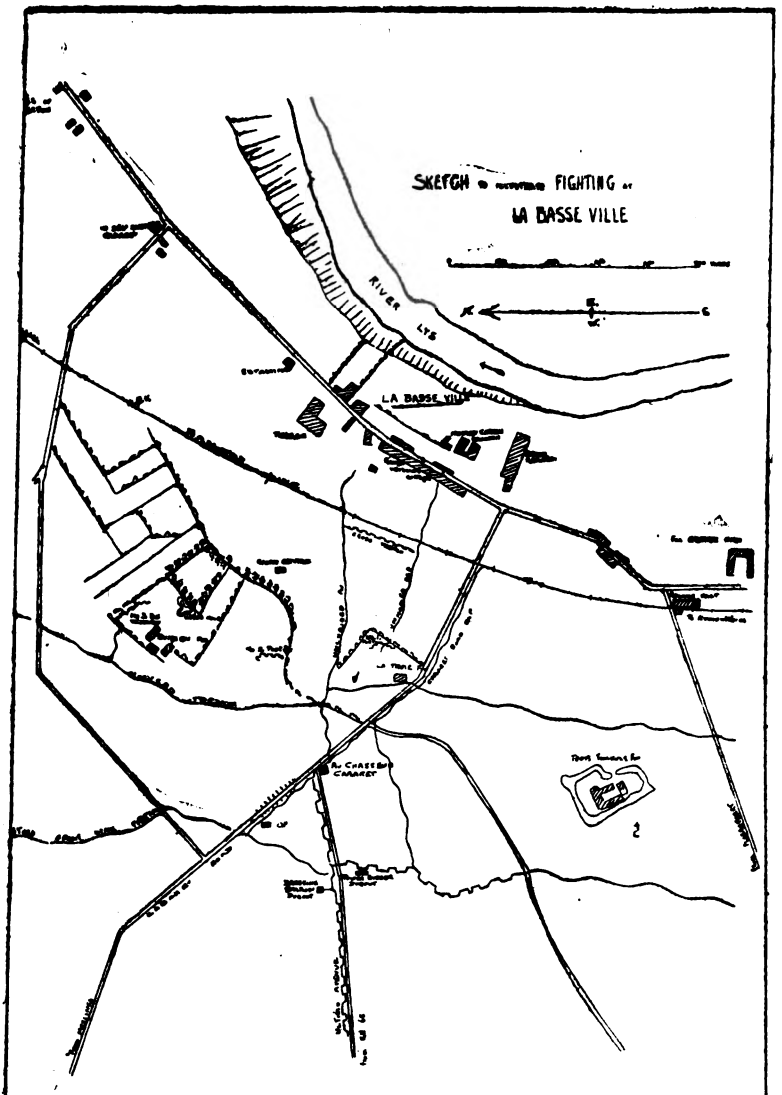
Illustrating account of Battle of the Somme.

Digitized by Google



Illustrating account of Battle of Messines.

Digitized by Google



Illustrating account of Attacks on La Basse Ville.

Digitized by Google

THREE YEARS WITH THE NEW ZEALANDERS

CHAPTER I

TRAINING IN NEW ZEALAND

NEW ZEALAND, or Aoteâ-roa (The Long White Cloud), as it was called by the ancient Maori inhabitants, that fertile, beautiful country, lying in its loneliness in the Pacific Ocean some twelve hundred miles from huge Continental Australia, did not hesitate, after the outbreak of war, to take up its share of the Empire's burdens, and by August 29th, 1914, the Samoan Expeditionary Force, consisting entirely of New Zealand troops, had captured Samoa, the crown of Germany's possessions in the Southern Pacific. In October the main body of the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, with its first reinforcement, also sailed for Egypt. The main body comprised a Brigade of Infantry, with its accompanying Artillery, Engineers, Army Service

Digitized by Google

Corps, etc., and four regiments of Mounted Infantry with their horses.

These no mean achievements for a country of something over a million inhabitants were rendered possible principally owing to the system of compulsory training which had been elaborated by Lord Kitchener and brought into operation in 1911. Major-General Sir Alexander Godley, K.C.M.G., was Commandant of the Forces, and had around him an efficient staff of Imperial and New Zealand officers and instructors, whose services were made available for Overseas campaigning. The organization for enrolling, equipping and training the Force was complete, and in three years since the commencement of the system a considerable number of the young men and boys of the Dominion had received some military education.

The continuity of the scheme was not broken by hostilities, and the reinforcements for the Expeditionary Force were trained apart from and in addition to the yearly quota of the colony's manhood becoming subject to the provisions of the Military Service Act.

As a cadet at my old school, Christ College (N.Z.), and later as a Volunteer, I had had some military training, but retired to the

Digitized by Google

Reserve of my regiment (11th Taranaki Rifles) with the rank of Captain shortly before Lord Kitchener's scheme was introduced. However, officers with experience were required, and having in October sent in my name for active service, I was appointed to the Wellington Company of the 6th Reinforcements, of which the officers and N.C.O.'s were to report at Trentham Camp on March 15th, 1915.

Very wisely, when war broke out the New Zealand Defence Department instituted Refresher Courses in various parts of the dominion for officers and N.C.O.'s who had volunteered for Overseas service, or were taking the place of others that had gone, and I was able to attend such a camp at the Wanganui Racecourse in January, 1915. A jolly camp it was, in pleasant surroundings and beautiful weather. Major W. C. Morrison was in command, a New Zealand Staff-corps man, with South African experience. His syllabus was practically a condensed form of Lord Kitchener's training of his New Armies, although the latter's schedule did not reach New Zealand until the course was almost completed. The course exemplified the new military methods: organization was good, and all preparations possible were made before-

Digitized by Google

hand—a striking contrast to some camps I had attended. War is like the law; battles, like cases, are won before they commence.

It must be admitted now, as experience has proved beyond doubt, that a man who has had some previous training more easily absorbs the military atmosphere than his fellow-citizen with none. People were prone to discount the value of the earlier training, but it stood many of us in good stead. It was difficult enough to adapt oneself to the new life, but it would have been infinitely harder, and taken longer, had one had no volunteer experience. The value of the system of Compulsory Training in this war has justified its existence.

The course was attended by a number of cadets, for whose military education full provision is made by the New Zealand Territorial scheme. Amongst the seniors was a patriotic officer, rather older than most of us, who had also come back from the Reserve in August; he brought an expensive motor-car into camp—a "Sunbeam," if I remember aright—and lodged it in one of the loose boxes. One day a little cadet N.C.O. had been excused from parade, and, wandering by the shed, was tempted and fell. The spectacle of a perilous, exciting journey round the racecourse ending in a

Digitized by Google

cannon off the outside rails of the straight, on to the fence in front of the grand-stand, was our share of the fun, in addition to the useful example of how a court-martial should be conducted.

The Regimental Camp, under Lieutenant-Colonel (then Major) Bellringer, on the banks of the Waiwakaiho River, gave one an opportunity of obtaining some practice in training men. There was little conception of how long the war would last, and a great number of the 900 men in camp hardly imagined they would eventually leave New Zealand in transports. I remember at that time receiving an answer from a public body, in which I held office, refusing to accept my proffered resignation on the ground that the war would be over in three months. Before the Regimental Camp broke up I left for Wellington, and lost my independence with the oath of allegiance.

One's subsequent experience has not shaken a belief that the training at Trentham was good, where at that time the reinforcements for all arms of the N.Z.E.F. were concentrated. The system employed was to train the officers, and a proportion of selected N.C.O.'s of the next reinforcement, as a squad by themselves for five

Digitized by Google

weeks, and then hand over to them the men when they came into camp. Thus the Company officers were given sole charge of their own men subject to general supervision by the staff. There were four companies of infantry of six platoons, each of 50 men, A, B, C and D, which composed the reinforcements for the Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago Battalions respectively. The companies were quite separate, but it may be that it would have been better to have organized them as a battalion, in order to give the officers and N.C.O.'s a knowledge of the interior economy of that unit.

The five months spent there were very interesting, and one carried away the pleasantest recollection of the place. No doubt many of us looked forward with dread to the wet Trentham winter, understanding how dependent civilian life had made us on external comforts. The prospect of being cold and of getting wet was anything but cheerful, for, indeed, our very happiness depended on being warm and dry. However, the winter, bad as it was, passed quickly enough; afterwards it became a habit not to speculate beyond the next twenty-four hours; with such an uncertain tenure of life, it was of little use looking on

Digitized by Google

the dark side of a future that one might never reach.

April 19th was a great day when the officers and N.C.O.'s of B Company turned out to meet the men they were going to train, and perhaps eventually to lead in action. I considered myself fortunate in the officers and N.C.O.'s that I had. We were a good team and pulled well together; I can only remember being obliged to disrate two N.C.O.'s till the time we joined the battalion at Lemnos in September. My Co. S.-M. Brodie, was an old Rifle Brigade Colour-Sergeant of ten years' service, and represented the best type of the N.C.O.'s of the old Regular Army. After resigning from the service, he had come out to New Zealand, and was green keeper to the Napier Golf Club when war broke out. He was a bachelor, and, I fancy, older than his " military age " of thirty-nine admitted; tactful to a degree, efficient, and, although as popular with his own company as with the other companies of the Reinforcement, yet a good disciplinarian. I became greatly attached to Brodie, and was very disappointed when we parted company on merging with the battalion, he going to the Wellington West Coast Company as Sergeant-Major. He did not live to see much

Digitized by Google

fighting, as he was one of our few casualties on the Apex. He was killed by a shell that ricocheted into his dug-out in a deep trench. His body lay for the day in a blanket in the little cemetery on the hillside, and after dark we buried him. A brave soldier and a gentleman was Brodie.

My officers had made up their minds that at any rate the men of B Company should not complain of the welcome they received on coming into camp, and each N.C.O. was told off to take charge of so many men and to make their arrival easy for them. After they had been fitted out with their kit and had seen the last of their civilian clothing, they were paraded and divided up into six Platoons, as far as possible according to the localities in which they lived: Wellington (Lieutenants Hume and Marshall), Ruahine (Lieutenant Webber), West Coast (Lieutenant Tremewan), Hawkes Bay (Lieutenant Muir), and Taranaki (Lieutenant Scott). There were several old Regulars amongst them; one could easily distinguish them, if only by the way they stood at attention; the hall-mark was unmistakable. For the rest, we were from all classes, and, thanks to the real spirit of democracy that we breathe in New Zealand, were, but for our military ranks, all equal.

Digitized by Google

We kept together as a Reinforcement until the end of September, and every week an improvement in the Company might be observed. The training was confined to infantry drill, bayonet fighting, and musketry; the latter including the Imperial course for recruits and trained men. Naturally, at that stage, there was no Lewis gun and bombing instruction.

As might be expected from volunteers, they possessed a keen desire to learn, and it was very noticeable how ready they were to receive suggestions. Give a people high standards—by suggestions couched in a way that appeals to them—the majority will attempt to reach them. To most of them the life was quite new, although there were amongst them several old Volunteers, in addition to the Regular soldiers. Of boys who had been through the Territorial Compulsory Training there were few, the average age being fairly high, about twenty-six years.

While the weather was warm we marched the Company down to the Hutt River every Wednesday and Saturday afternoons for a swim. In those days the washing and bathing arrangements were very primitive compared with those existing now in the New Zealand camps.

Digitized by Google

Rapidly the winter months went by, and the time for our final leave approached. The camp was very crowded in July, but an outbreak of cerebro-spinal meningitis cleared it in a single night of all the troops except the 6th Reinforcement Infantry. One of my men, a Russian exile, contracted the dread disease, but eventually recovered. Gargle parades three times a day earned the reward of escaped infection.

While we were on leave there was a heavy flood in the Hutt valley, and our tents, pitched in a low-lying part of the camp, in some cases withstood the torrent, in others did not. I believe it was a brave sight, our calico houses sailing down stream in what seemed an attempt at orderly formation.

Leave over, we did our outpost and attack manœuvres and then turned to our packing and final preparations for the transport.

A day or two before we were due to sail, His Excellency the Governor, the Earl of Liverpool, an old Rifle Brigade officer, addressed the officers of the Reinforcement. His theme was the duty of looking after our men; and writing after an interval of nearly three years, I find it hard to suggest a parting word more appropriate.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

NEW ZEALAND TO LEMNOS

AS was the practice, our Reinforcement of all arms trained into Wellington on the Saturday morning and embarked on the two transports, Nos. 27 and 28, which lay in line alongside the wharf. After dinner on board, we marched through the streets of the city with bayonets fixed. The weather was perfect and the line of march was thronged with people right back to the wharves. The war had assumed a different aspect since the departure of the last Reinforcement. The idea that peace would be signed in the autumn had gone, and the true nature of the grim struggle before us was beginning to show itself more clearly. No longer were our men sailing away on a voyage of Happy Adventure, to return very soon with minds broadened by acquaintances with other countries and peoples, but were saying good-bye to their loved ones before

Digitized by Google

entering into the Valley of the Shadow. Only a fortnight ago, the first draft of wounded from Gallipoli had landed in Wellington, and not a few of those who watched us march by were mourning for their soldier dead. This could not but be reflected in the send-off the people gave us and perhaps in the manner of our response. We left with no illusions as to the future.

It was not long after all the men had got on board again that the gangways were pulled ashore and we glided out into the stream, where we anchored for the night. We lay there until next morning, although one or two privileged people went on shore on official business. A tremor of the ship at 5 a.m. and we had started on our five weeks' voyage to Suez, via Albany.

We had no definite idea that we were bound for Gallipoli; of course we knew our Main Body was there, but various rumours proposed us for service in Salonika, India, or France, as it suited the imagination of the particular prophet. On the day we left, word had reached New Zealand of the Suvla Bay fighting on August 8th and on the following days. The death of Lieutenant-Colonel W. G. Malone, the first Commanding Officer of the Wellington Battalion, came as a

Digitized by Google

great shock to us. We heard the casualties were severe, but the people of New Zealand really did not understand how extremely heavy they were until long after the close of the Peninsular Campaign. They were even less prepared than the military authorities for the appalling losses of modern warfare. Lieutenant-Colonel Malone was an interesting figure from my part of the Dominion, Taranaki, and it so happened that I had met him a good deal in our profession, of which he was an active member, in politics and in volunteering. He came to the Dominion as a young man, and was a pioneer in the best sense of the word; a private in the Armed Constabulary, then a farmer in the Bush Country, a business man and eventually a barrister and solicitor. A man of great energy, extraordinary determination, with a gift for detail which was almost a fetish, he left with the Wellington Regiment a spirit of earnest thoroughness easily recognizable as his, even in the two of its three Battalions that were formed months after his death.

Then, and I have never heard that it was improved on in later days, there was no liaison between the Main Body and its reinforcements in training. We did our best to infuse a Company spirit into the men, but a great opportunity was lost in not

Digitized by Google

treating them at once as units of regiments that had already won honours for their respective colours.

We had the Officer in Command of the Reinforcement, Major Samuel, on board our troopship, with Major Morrison as his Chief of Staff. Major S. S. Allen, of Auckland, was Officer in Command of the ship, and he did me the disservice of taking Brodie as his Regimental Sergeant-Major. The latter's place in the Company was filled by Sergeant Hopkirk, who, with his brother, had been in the Samoan Force. Hopkirk was an excellent fellow, and a great worker; moreover, luckily, he was a good sailor, for I was not, and was a victim until we disembarked at Suez. He got his commission on landing in France, and was killed on the 1st June, 1916, by a sniper, opposite Wez Macquart. The race is not always to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Hopkirk would have done well in his new profession, but Providence decided he should not endure long.

It was a man's ship with the exception of three nursing sisters, and the misogynists gloried in the atmosphere of quiet on board. We certainly did not quarrel even towards the end of a voyage that was quite uneventful. Some of my Company knew I

Digitized by Google

had tried, without success, in New Zealand to obtain a Tuatara lizard as a Company mascot, and with commendable spirit, as I thought, one of them broke ship at Albany, bringing back with him a very decrepit parrot. Unfortunately, he had to add to his crime next day by going ashore once more to buy dried peas for its sustenance; I fancy he also purchased a certain amount of drink for himself on both occasions. Polly was not popular as a mascot, and after he disappeared, not far from Aden, it was never said he had taken the Company luck with him.

We had a happy day at Albany. The whole Reinforcement marched through the town and was entertained at tea by the Mayor. The weather had been horribly rough in the Australian Bight, and all hands enjoyed the opportunity of stretching their sea legs. It made no attempt to improve until we turned northwards round Cape Leeuwin. With the advent of fine weather came harder work, and in consequence the men were really not very stale when we disembarked at Suez. Syllabi of training were made and strictly adhered to. Naturally some considerable part of the time was devoted to lecturettes by the platoon commanders to their men, and

Digitized by Google

these boys addressed their commands on all sorts of subjects, day after day, with a truly indomitable spirit, and moreover held their attention. I am sure a clergyman would have been a little shy of meeting his congregation so often. We had to cudgel our brains to select topics.

The most important duty was keeping the ship clean, and our Officer in Command of the ship exacted a high standard. However, we were all very keen, as we realized we might be carrying the germs of cerebro-spinal meningitis with us, and the discipline was good. As far as I was concerned, there was nothing I liked less than the daily pilgrimage through the parts of the ship where smells had to be fought but generally seemed to win.

The weather gradually became hotter, and the number of men allowed to sleep on decks was increased to a maximum. Before I turned in, I generally strolled round the ship, to find the men lying packed together in all conceivable attitudes on the bare decks, many with nothing but Nature's garments. Most of us are quite dependent for our happiness upon our many modern comforts, but there were these boys on hard boards with no pillows or mattresses, sleeping like babes in their cots. As we had

Digitized by Google

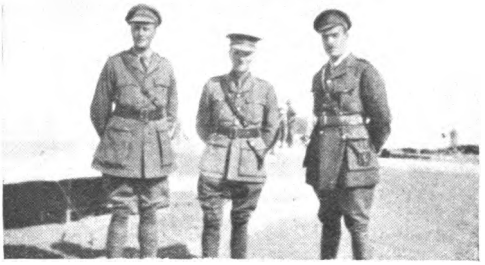
Lieut.-Col. Malone outside his dugout on Quinn's Post (Gallipoli).

Lieut.-Col. Hart, Lieut. A. B. McColl, Major Fletcher, on the Apex, September, 1915.

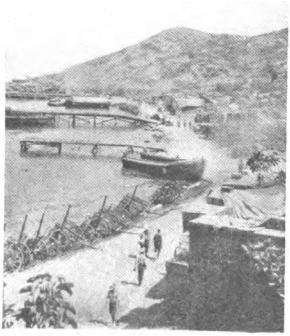
[*To face p.* 22.

Digitized by Google

The hospital and dugout at No. 2 outpost, Gallipoli.



Lieut. Varnham, Major Weston, Lieut. Scott.



The beach at Anzac.

Trench at Gallipoli.

Digitized by Google

no uniform fit for the tropics, we were allowed to discard part of the service dress, and those officers who had brought flannels with them were happy. For officers the nights were rather trying, owing to the strict regulations forbidding any open doors or portholes through which light could find its way. As it was, messages, anything but congratulatory in tone, constantly passed between the two ships, calling each other's attention to the presence of tell-tale gleams. Night after night the darkness shut out the presence of our consort, whom the morning light again revealed. She was a faster boat than the *Willochra*, and had to abandon her nocturnal gains by dropping astern during the day.

The very uncertainty of the future makes a soldier enjoy the present—*carpe diem;* and that voyage was very pleasant. The ordered routine of a military regime robs life of its minor worries; our circle was congenial, the food was good and the weather perfect. It is true the latter part of the time was disturbed by the wireless news of the Russian Retreat.

We had indulged in hopes of landing at Colombo, perhaps Bombay or Aden, but all that we realized was to anchor in the Aden roadstead for a few hours awaiting orders.

Digitized by Google

Here we all received our first grim impression of the realities of war. As we rounded the point we met, also under easy steam, an Indian hospital ship on its way to Bombay. I remember the hush that fell over our transport at the sight of those bandaged figures that lined the bulwarks to watch us pass, and no one ventured to break the silence even by cheering the gallant fellows returning shattered and maimed to their own country.

Suez seemed deserted in comparison with peace times. Our Military Landing Officer was apparently in sole possession of the railway station, while a company of Indian troops camped in one of the sheds on the wharf.

From him we learned that the 5th Reinforcement had only spent four days in Egypt, but could gather no information as to our own movements. Indeed, the secret was so well kept that, for four days out of the five that we were given in that wonderful old country, we had no idea where or when we should go, or whether as an independent battalion or as reinforcements. The five days, as can be imagined, were very full, what with Training, Inspections and Sight-seeing. Two officers of the Wellington Battalion, I was going to say

Digitized by Google

fresh from Gallipoli, came into the mess while we were at Zeitoun. One of them I had known in New Zealand, and could realize the effect of the campaign upon him. I never saw anyone in France so pulled down as were the soldiers on Gallipoli; they were simply shadows of themselves. They had been in no better condition in August, and I can never think without a thrill of how, half dead with dysentery, they climbed the steep slopes of Chunuk Bair to fight those terrific battles of the 8th and following days. These two officers were able to give us some idea of how things were with the New Zealand Infantry and Mounted Brigades, which, together with the 4th Australian Infantry Brigade, formed the New Zealand and Australian Division of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (Anzac). I also met a New Zealand doctor who had brought with him a collection of excellent photographs of the strip of land to which the Corps had been clinging. One could imagine Lord Kitchener's and Sir Charles Monro's astonishment at the place when they saw it in November, 1916.

The sea journey from Alexandria to Lemnos gave us our first sensation of submarine dangers, and of a steamer manned by a crew composed of other nationalities

Digitized by Google

only, in some cases, to receive laconic replies, pathetic in their curtness. B Company, 6th Reinforcement, had merged in the Wellington Battalion of the New Zealand Infantry Brigade.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

LEMNOS

LEMNOS and Tenedos stand sentinels over the gates of the Dardanelles. In ancient times the former was sacred to Hephaestus (Vulcan), who, so the legend tells, fell on the island when his father Zeus hurled him headlong from Olympus. Another legend says that Philoctetes was left there by the Greeks, on the way to the Siege of Troy, to nurse his wounded foot in agony for ten years until Ulysses and Neoptolemus induced him to accompany them. He lived beside Mount Hermaeus, one of the beacon points that flashed home to Argos the news of Troy's downfall. The Minyae, the inhabitants of the island, sent wine and provisions to the Greeks before Troy. In those days Myrina (modern Kastro) on the west, and Hephaestra on the east, were its two cities. A deserted place called Palaeo Kastro marks the site of Hephaestra, which no doubt owing to

Digitized by Google

its eastern situation was the first to be attacked by Miltiades, the Tyrant of Thracian Chersonese (Gallipoli). It quickly fell, but Kastro, with its strong citadel built on a perpendicular rock, sustained a siege. After its conquest by Miltiades, Lemnos secured to Athens her trade on the Black Sea. With the fortune of war the dominion of the island thereafter passed through Macedonian, Roman, Greek, Italian and Turkish hands, eventually returning to Greece after the second Balkan War of 1913. Its area is approximately 150 square miles and its population before the Great War was said to be 30,000 Greeks and 5,000 Turks, the latter including political offenders, for, during many years, the island was Turkey's place of banishment. Statistics say 20,000 sheep were its total livestock, which will give a good idea of its poverty. The valleys were cultivated, but the hills were neglected and produced nothing.

From a military standpoint, Lemnos was on the Lines of Communication to Gallipoli, and accordingly was under naval command. The Division had no base there, and on its arrival in September from the Peninsula, for a few weeks' rest, found no comfortable quarters awaiting it. The camp had been pitched on the northern slope of the west

Digitized by Google

side of Mudros Harbour, at a place called Sarpi, and a bleaker and more inhospitable spot I find it hard to picture. For tents and camp material of any kind, Brigades had to rely upon the generosity of Lines of Communication, who had little enough to distribute. In consequence not very much could be done for the comfort of the men. Not that it mattered for new arrivals, but the Peninsula men needed everything that could be given them. The area held at Anzac was so limited that the troops were really never out of the firing line, and the Division had had no rest since the fighting at the beginning of August; moreover, the heavy casualties had so reduced their numbers that those left had to do extra work to both occupy and improve the trenches. Dysentery, too, had played havoc with them, and they looked like famine victims alongside the reinforcements. What a toll wounds and disease had taken can be seen from the fact that out of nearly 2,000 of all ranks of the Battalion that had landed on the Dardanelles since April 25th, 13 officers and 212 other ranks alone returned to Lemnos in September, and, as can be easily understood, the evacuations to hospital continued to be heavy. Still, in spite of the lack of comfort and of the keen autumn

Digitized by Google

winds that swept Lemnos, the old hands were glad enough of the spell, and after a few weeks hardly knew themselves. I remember well one man in my Company who, I was told, had done excellent work on Gallipoli and although he was in a really low state of health refused to " go sick." He was beginning to lose faith in his recovery, when Company Sergeant-Major Wood (who was destined afterwards to add considerably to the distinction he had already earned), succeeded with his usual sympathetic instinct in persuading him that to take more interest in his diet would work a certain cure. With much faith in Wood's medical skill, he carried out the treatment most conscientiously, and some days after Wood escorted me to the man's little " bivvy," built alongside one of the three marquees the Company possessed, to witness the tempting sight of a roast fowl and two vegetables being dished up, cooked by him in an earth oven near by. His menus, thanks to Wood, had become a hobby, giving him an added lease of life. I was sorry we were not able to take him with us on the 8th November, 1915, but he was classed B and left behind.

On the death of Lieutenant-Colonel Malone, Major W. H. Fletcher took over the command of the Battalion temporarily,

Digitized by Google

until Lieutenant-Colonel H. Hart, D.S.O., arrived from England in the beginning of September. The latter had been severely wounded shortly after the landing in April and had been invalided to England. He left New Zealand with the Main Body as second in command, and earned his decoration at the landing. His adjutant was Lieutenant A. B. McColl.

Lieutenant-Colonel Hart gave me the command of the Taranaki (C) Company, a command that I had the fortune to retain, with a few weeks' exception, until December, 1916; a long time as time goes in this war. The Company represented in the Battalion the 11th Taranaki Rifles Regiment, which wears on its badge the honours "Waireka" and "South Africa." The fathers and grandfathers of the present generation of that very attractive and flourishing Province of New Zealand had fought for their footing in the country in the Sixties, and probably that struggle left an imprint on them that was passed down by inheritance to their children. When I took over, a Company Tradition was in existence, which we all guarded most zealously, secretly hoping to hand it on with added lustre. The strict theory is that the only man in the Army who actually commands men is the Section Leader; the

Digitized by Google

Platoon Commander has four Section Leaders under him, while the Company Commander directs four Platoon Commanders, and so on to the Commander in Chief. In practice, however, the Commander of a Company is very near to his men, and he has the happiness of having them about him and their being dependent upon him. There is no better job in the British Army than that of a Company Commander, and I wished for no finer Company than mine.

Neither the Mounted Brigade nor ourselves were given many idle moments; for a rest on active service is another name for training, which some zealous Commanders endeavour to make more and more intensive. Barren Lemnos, with its unfenced rolling country, was an ideal manœuvre ground on which Corps could have been handled with ease, and so mimic battles were fought by night as well as by day. As the mounted men had no horses with them, all their mounts having been left behind at Cairo, they did their work on foot. At off times a certain amount of boating on the Harbour was enjoyed by the men, whose endeavour was to board newly-arrived ships for tinned fruit and fish, chocolate, etc.

One afternoon, a week or two after we joined the Battalion, I received orders to

Digitized by Google

report at Brigade at 4 p.m. with 12 picked men carrying 48 hours' rations. With suppressed excitement I got my team together, surmising some special duty on the Peninsula, to which everyone seemed to know we were returning. However, at Headquarters, I learned that my mission was to take charge of my party and a similar one provided by the First Australian Division, in order to police the town of Kastro, the capital of the island.

Kastro boasted in pre-war days of a population of 4,000 Greeks and 800 Turks, and possessed an excellent harbour, through which passed the principal part of the island's trade. It seemed that some of the troops had been treating that charming spot as a week-end resort, and their efforts to throw aside memories of battle had rather disturbed the Greek population. That week at Kastro was the brightest part of my time on Lemnos. Lieutenant-Colonel Fortescue provided a comfortable house for the Posse, while my quarters were in an adjoining hotel, whose Greek proprietor had made a small fortune in America. The historic old fortress, in which were some guns cast in the time of Philip II. of Spain, overlooked the town from its rocky pinnacle, and in imagination one reconstructed its unsuccessful defence

Digitized by Google

against the Turks by a Venetian garrison for sixty-three days in 1657. Below the rock was a beach of yellow sand from which we bathed and fished. Kastro was a quaint old place, and another legend has it that in ancient times the shadow of Mount Athos, forty miles away, fell at sunset upon a bronze cow in the market-place. The Greek shopkeepers had asked for our protection, for, while pleased to see their wines and spirits consumed in quantity by soldier customers, they shrank from the effects of such libations. In my official capacity I called on the Greek Military Governor, a young man, but a veteran of the last two Balkan Wars. Turkish delight, which came from one of the other Ægean Islands, coffee and liqueurs, formed his afternoon hospitality, and during our week's tour of duty we were all much indebted to the British Naval Representative at Kastro, who was a native of Cyprus where he had held a position in the Police.

We had one exciting afternoon, being summoned to a neighbouring village by the local priest, who appealed for our help through the Archbishop of Kastro. The complaint was that some soldiers had taken up their residence in the village and were terrorizing the inhabitants. We made a forced march

Digitized by Google

and deported the men, who, though drunk, seemed peaceable enough. The priest was there at the head of his flock, and called down blessings on our heads, but one of the deportees, on the way out, informed my sergeant that they had incurred his displeasure by refusing to buy very indifferent cognac from him behind the back of the innkeeper. We ended our tour of duty by a pleasant march back to camp, stopping on the summit to bathe in the hot mineral springs and to eat the customary meal of fried eggs, coffee, brown bread, butter and honey.

No word had come of the Division moving, and training pursued its course. Between our camp and the landing-place were British, Canadian and Australian hospitals, some in tents and some in huts. Their people were very kind and hospitable to us, and all we could do in return was to invite them to our cricket and football matches played on the rough ground, originally laid out on the mudflats by the Navy, and to our camp-fire concerts on Sarpi Hill. These hospitals had endured great hardships since the day they landed on Lemnos, and their history went hand-in-hand with that of the Gallipoli Campaign.

While on Lemnos the Division was in-

Digitized by Google

spected by Sir Charles Monro, then engaged in the examination of the actual conditions on the spot, that formed the basis of his report advising the Evacuation of the Dardanelles.

On the 6th November we received orders to re-embark for the Peninsula, and it was a bright, sunny morning (November 8th) on which we fell in with full kit and marched again down to the landing-stage, through the streets of the hospitals. All the medicos and their staffs turned out to give us a send-off, and with their good wishes in our ears we filed on board the transport.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

GALLIPOLI

THE transport that took Brigade Headquarters, the Canterbury Battalion (Lieutenant-Colonel R. Young, C.M.G., D.S.O.) and ourselves to the Peninsula was the one in which we had come from Alexandria, and her departure was so timed that she arrived off Anzac in darkness. We had dinner on board, and, in the crowded saloon, I had my first experience of that feeling of tension that is abroad on the eve of action. There is no mistaking it; it is more tangible than a feeling of hostility or of goodwill in an audience, perhaps because a greater proportion of those present are affected.

It was a calm, star-lit night with no moon, and when the steamer lost her way in the smooth waters off Gaba Tepe, one was allowed to step out on to the deck and take in an impression of that extraordinary place; for, throughout, it was the extraordinary character of the enterprise that was so

Digitized by Google

striking. The August fighting had extended the British holding a little inland and northwards to include Suvla Bay, but looking at the high shapes of the hills from the ship we could not see as far as Suvla, and, even more so than in the daylight, it looked as if we were hanging on to a precipice with our backs to the sea. The line of the opposing trenches was shown by the flashes of the rifles as all night the crack, crack went on from one end to the other. Up against the face of the cliff glimmered innumerable lights, like glow-worms, from the dug-outs of the Australians. It reminded me very much of anchoring off the mines at Puysegur Point in the South Island of New Zealand,

During the time I was on the Peninsula we were spared the pleasure of regular Artillery Night Firing, an abomination which the British invented at the Battle of the Somme, and in consequence our only risk in landing by the lighters, on this occasion, was from dropping bullets. My Company got ashore with the loss of one man wounded in the throat. The Battalion mustered on the beach, and, headed by the Commanding Officer and a guide provided by the Brigade Advance Party, we marched northwards along the sand to a point at which we turned up to Watercourse Gully. The Company

Digitized by Google

was so weak that, with Lieutenant-Colonel Hart's permission, I had reorganized it into two Platoons, Nos. 9 and 12, under the command of Lieutenant R. F. C. Scott and Second Lieutenant F. S. Varnham respectively. Quartermaster-Sergeant A. R. McIsaac was with the Company until the 26th November, 1915, when he was appointed Regimental Quartermaster-Sergeant, and Company Sergeant-Major Wood took his position and Sergeant G. Bertrand became Company Sergeant-Major. Lance-Corporal R. Quilliam was Company Clerk.

We picnicked there for the rest of the night in little bivvys dug out of the sandhills, and two days after relieved the 25th Australian Battalion on the Apex. The Auckland Battalion held Rhododendron Spur on our right and the Canterbury Battalion, Cheshire Ridge on our left, Otago Battalion being in reserve down the Dere below Brigade Headquarters. The 4th Australian Brigade was on the right of our Brigade and the New Zealand Mounted Brigade on the left. A few days after we landed, Brigadier-General F. E. Johnston, C.B., had to go back to Egypt, and until his return the Brigade was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel W. G. Braithwaite, C.M.G., D.S.O., Royal Welsh Fusiliers, who was granted the temporary

Digitized by Google

rank of Colonel. Colonel Braithwaite had been Major-General Sir Alexander Godley's Divisional Chief of Staff, and later, as Commander of the Second New Zealand Brigade, that was formed in Egypt in March, 1916, was one of our most striking personalities. There were more stories of General "Bill" in the New Zealand Division than of anyone, although I cannot recollect a touch of malice in one of them.

About the middle of the Apex, our trenches were some forty yards from the Turkish Blockhouse situated on the little neck of land that connected the Rhododendron, Apex and Cheshire Ridges with the higher slopes of Chunuk Bair. The Brigade reached the summit of that mountain in August, and some of our dead lay on the Straits side of it, but the Apex represented the furthest point that was subsequently held. And there we remained for six weeks until the evacuation in December, half way up the side of a steep hill and not more than two miles from a harbourless beach upon which stores and munitions were landed at night, and then only in calm weather and by the grace of the submarines. One's inclination is always to believe the story that Lord Kitchener's first exclamation upon landing on Anzac beach was, "Good God Almighty."

Digitized by Google

Our Divisional Batteries were situated on the beach and looked for support from the guns of two or three destroyers that steamed up and down day and night. From the beach to the Apex a clay track wandered up the Dere, along which the wonderful mules with their Indian masters brought our water, food and munitions. This track in wet weather became a slippery quagmire. To anyone with imagination, the blizzard of the end of November was unnecessary to teach us our dependence upon the chances of a fine winter.

While the Division was on Lemnos, the relieving Australians had done great work on the Apex, and we found trenches dug deep in the chalky gravel and fairly good fine-weather dug-outs. All around the Apex lay the unburied dead of the August battles : Ghurkas, Welshmen, Englishmen and our own. In one look-out corner in the front line, the sentry at night rested his elbows on the grave of a fellow-countryman whose remains lay in the parapet itself.

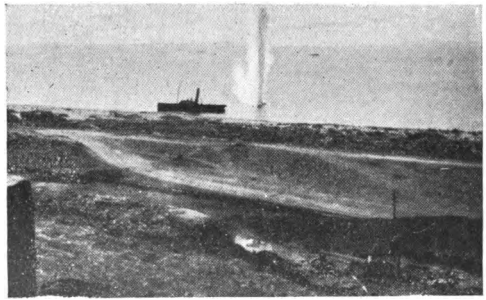
My little cabin was the best in the Company Sector and consisted of a hole, 4 feet by 2 feet 6 inches, driven 6 feet into the side of the trench, and in it one slept, made one's toilette and transacted the Company business. I purposely refrain from any reference to

Digitized by Google

dressing because one never undressed; the water for shaving and the daily wash was limited to what could be contained in a blue enamel coffee mug.

I cannot say that I enjoyed the few weeks we were on the Peninsula, because a gastro-enteritis that I had developed on the transport in the Tropics remained with me until we left for France in April, 1916, and good health, necessary to happiness at all times, is vital on active service. But I want to protect myself from any suspicion of complaint against the conditions under which we lived. Lack of exercise one certainly felt, but custom soon restored the balance as far as everything else was concerned, and it was a fact that some dug-outs, all of which were excellent, were better than others. In any case I am sure the Headquarters dug-out in the Company Sector opposite the Blockhouse was better than many others because of the glorious view it possessed from its trench—a view that embraced, on the south, Imbros, the red marble mass of Samothrace, Suvla Bay, part of the Gulf of Xeros and Anafarta. The sunrises and sunsets in the eastern Mediterranean were indescribably beautiful. The work of man were the graceful hospital ships in the Bight and the destroyers cease-

Digitized by Google



Turkish shell exploding, fired at steamer on beach.

Loading mules at Gallipoli.

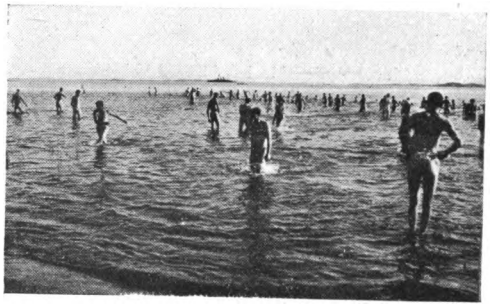
Q.M. stores, Wellington Battalion, in blizzard. Padre Richards, Major Weston, Lieut. Dallinger.

Apex in the blizzard. December, 1915.

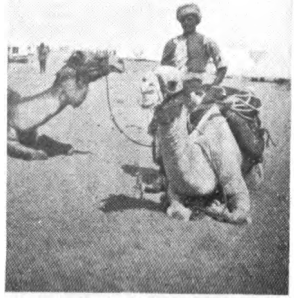
[*To face p.* 44.

Digitized by Google

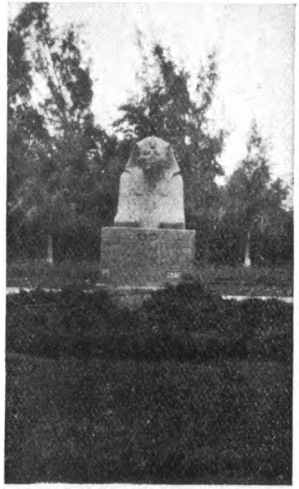
My departure from 2nd Battalion.



Men bathing in Lake Timsah.



2nd Battalion's original transport.



View in Ismailia Gardens.

Digitized by Google

lessly gliding up and down like caged panthers. At intervals they stopped for their " hates," when we could actually pick up the shells with our eyes as they forged their way through the air, up the Dere close over our heads, to burst in the Turkish trenches a few yards away.

The weather had been clear and warm for the first week or two, and so the blizzard, which we all agreed came direct from the steppes of Russia, wherever they are, caught us unprepared. The snow and wind were the coldest we had ever known, and our Otago men, who can speak with authority, agreed. But being on a hillside we were not cursed with the dire effects of the rain, which played such havoc with the troops, British and Turks alike, at Suvla Bay, and our evacuations were few. In those sectors the trenches themselves became raging torrents, and the men, drenched as they were, suffered disastrously from the blizzard that followed. There were actually 200 deaths from drowning and exposure, and more than 10,000 evacuated " sick." Besides the loss of lives, the storm did considerable damage to the flimsy wharves on the beach, and many of the lighters, so important to our well-being, were damaged or destroyed. It was a warning not to be dis-

Digitized by Google

possible position. We could not go forward, so we had to go out. And with Austrian howitzers, together with winter at hand, there was no need to stand upon ceremony as to our going.

Some time before the actual evacuation, rumours reached us from the Beach, whence all rumours came, that it was contemplated. Senior Officers strenuously denied them, but evidence of stores, and especially rum, being destroyed, and mules and guns being shipped away, proved too strong, and eventually we were all let into the secret. In accordance, however, with Sir Charles Monro's plans, we carried out our usual daily routine—except that at odd intervals, both by day and night, every gun and rifle in the Sector was quiet for some two or three hours, so that, when our last thin line of sentries would file out of the deserted trenches and slip down the Dere to the waiting lighters, the Turks' suspicions would not be awakened by the silence that must follow their departure.

It had the luck that every plan as well designed and executed deserves. The weather was its fortunate part, indeed the Keystone—absolutely calm moonlight nights, with a heavy fog in the early hours of the morning. Even a light breeze from the south

Digitized by Google

or south-west would have raised a ground swell that would have interfered with communication with the Beach, while anything approaching a gale from those quarters would have necessitated a postponement of all operations for the time being. At no time did I think it was a scheme that ran any great risk of failure from active opposition on the Turks' part, and similar operations in France have served to confirm this, but nevertheless it was well done.

There was no preliminary retirement to inner lines, although General Birdwood had prepared a small Keep on Walker's Ridge, nearer the Beach, to cover the withdrawal of the rearmost parties, if necessary. The Reserve Companies departed on the 18th, and those holding the trenches on the following night. The latter were divided into three parties, and embarked in order at the times appointed. Soon after nightfall the covering ships were on their stations and the withdrawal began. At 1.30 a.m. the rearmost parties were leaving the front trenches at Suvla Bay and on the left of Anzac. On the right of Anzac, where the lines drew nearer to the sea, the last defenders remained until 2 a.m. By 5.30 a.m. the evacuation was complete. The Naval arrangements were good, and we simply

Digitized by Google

marched down the Dere on to the lighters, waiting at the Anzac Pier, from which we transhipped to small steamers that took us to Lemnos. We had the airmen to keep any spying hostile planes away, and I recollect pacing up and down the trench in the moonlight waiting my turn to go, and watching our plane doing sentry-go overhead. Practically all stores were systematically destroyed before we disembarked, and, thanks to an organized enthusiasm, the Artillery left no guns behind of any value. Those actually left at Anzac were four 18-pounders, two 5-inch howitzers, one 4.7-inch naval gun, one anti-aircraft and two 3-pounder Hotchkiss guns, but they were destroyed before the final embarkation. Much to the sorrow of their Indian grooms, fifty-six mules had to be abandoned, with a number of wheelless carts and some supplies that were set on fire.

As it was impossible to dispose of the bombs, flares, small arms ammunition and trench stores in any other way, they were buried in large holes, dug in the places where spoil from the mine tunnels was dumped. The hole my Company dug, I imagined, was rather like the one dug by Captain Flint on Treasure Island, in which he stored his gold bars and pieces of eight.

We were glad to see each other when we

Digitized by Google

met once more on Lemnos. Our passage there was marked by our first civilized breakfast on board a large steamer in Mudros, upon which part of the Brigade was dumped for a few hours. Is it that our primitive instincts are the strongest? To be hungry and to eat, to be thirsty and to drink, are they the keenest pleasures, after all?

This time we were camped on the east side of Mudros Harbour, near a village in which were some French troops. They seemed an elderly stamp of men. A day or two after our arrival some Senegalese joined them from Camp Helles, and our men were much interested in their kit and elaborate cooking arrangements. We commenced training, but not for long, as the day before Christmas some of the Battalion embarked for Egypt, and with them went Scott and Varnham. This left Lieutenant Kibble-white and myself in possession of the tent, and, rather disconsolately, he and I walked into the village on Christmas Eve to make our purchases for the morrow's dinner. We were mighty thankful, however, when we received orders early in the morning to move, and still more so when we found ourselves on board the S.S. *Simla*. It was a day of joy unalloyed, with comfortable quarters, a real Christmas dinner, and the men fed just

Digitized by Google

as well as the officers. The troops on board were mostly Australians, and they very kindly shared their gift plum-puddings with us. The feeling between the Australians and ourselves has always been excellent, and I can remember on the Apex hearing the older hands, in their dug-outs close by mine, expatiating on the virtues of the 4th Australian Brigade that had fought alongside them. Although they were proud to have a complete New Zealand Division, the Peninsula veterans sincerely regretted the parting with the Australians necessitated by its formation later.

The voyage back to Alexandria was without incident. We had no destroyer escort, and did not zigzag, and moreover were told we had to trust to the ship's speed and her two guns. We hoped the gunners were good shots, as we knew the ship was not exactly an ocean racehorse. The Military Landing Officers kept us waiting in harbour for twenty-four hours, and we then entrained for Ismailia, where we were to make our home for the next three months.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

WINTER IN EGYPT

THE Staff. was wise in its generation when it placed us in winter quarters in the desert, near the Suez Canal and Ismailia. The desert in winter is roomy and healthy, and from ancient times has been the retreat of would-be anchorites.

Before we settled down a certain amount of reorganization had to be done. Sir Alexander Godley was promoted Temporary Lieutenant-General to the Corps, although still retaining control of the N.Z.E.F., and from the command of our Mounted Brigade, Brigadier-General A. H. Russell came to the Division with temporary rank of Major-General, shortly afterwards receiving his K.C.M.G. However good its personnel may be, a Military Force, or indeed any corporate body, can only reach a high standard if its leaders are good, and we can judge ourselves fortunate in having Sir Andrew Russell at our head. As a young man he

Digitized by Google

had been for some years in the Regular Army, and afterwards in New Zealand was a keen Volunteer and Territorial Officer. His common sense and energy, combined with a disregard of personal danger, are to my mind his outstanding features. Common sense has been defined as the capacity of seeing things as they are, and doing things as they ought to be done, and this capacity General Russell possesses. His energy makes him a hard worker, and insists on his doing what is a vital necessity in warfare—seeing himself that his commands are carried out. I know there is a difference of opinion as to what extent a senior commander is justified in exposing himself, but I am convinced that his course is the right one. He has, in consequence, a first-hand knowledge of his sector that allows of no work being left undone, and no orders being disregarded, and, moreover, he sets a personal example of courage that cannot fail to inspire all ranks. Men very readily detect any tendency in their officers to look after their own safety, but no one more generously recognizes bravery than they do, and a contempt of danger is catching, even more, I believe, than its reverse. A very great share of whatever honour the Division has gained justly belongs to its Commander.

Digitized by Google

The Mounted Brigade severed its connection with us; the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the newly formed New Zealand Brigade, afterwards called the 3rd N.Z.R. Brigade, joined us from Cairo after the Campaign against the Senussi, and the Divisional Train and Battalion Transports reached us from Alexandria, where they had dwelt during the Gallipoli venture. In the process the camp of the Division crystallized around the Moascar Railway Siding, with its flanks on Ismailia and the Sweetwater Canal.

I am sure Ismailia was the first oasis. Completely surrounded by desert, this charming spot of shade and vividly green vegetation, with the Sweetwater Canal running through it and the Lake lapping its plantations, basks in the Egyptian sun, in which it alone seems to delight. It is a garden village, built by the Suez Canal Company, and the squalid native portion of it is small. Fortunately for us, the Company Officials had founded a club, to which they kindly admitted us, an act of self-sacrifice, for the two services descended upon it and took complete possession. It was a pleasant end to the day sometimes to walk or ride in from Camp to tea, a hot bath, a game of billiards and dinner. A dignified man was the bath attendant, who, I rather suspect, was a

Digitized by Google

Turk, and in his view his duty demanded that he should sit stolidly in the room while you had your tub. From the club it is a short distance to the Ismailia Gardens, with a botanical collection so good one would hardly expect to find it there, and a few monuments of ancient Egypt. Out of the Northern Exit a road runs through an avenue of trees to the Ferry across the Suez Canal: just before it reaches the Canal, a branch climbs the high ground on which stands the Canal Company's Hospital. From there, with the desert breeze in one's face, one can watch the steamers threading their way through the Canal, which loses itself in the waters of Lake Timsah, to regain its independence once more on the southern shore.

British warships passed in and out of The Lake, and on one occasion we played a game of Rugby with a team from the Navy. The ships assisted from the Canal in the bombardment of the Turks when the latter attacked it in the early part of 1915, and the spot on which the 2nd Brigade camped when it was first formed, carried on its surface a good deal of British steel sprinkled on the Turkish concentration there. This year also it was the general idea that the Turks would make another

Digitized by Google

attempt; troops were concentrated in the Canal zone, and a great deal of work was done and money spent upon defences. Railways and roads were built, trenches dug and water-pipes laid. As can be imagined, trenches in the desert filled up almost as rapidly as they were completed. In January the Ruahine Company of the Battalion, under Captain Murray Urquhart, had to garrison one of the posts on the Canal, and its means of communication with the western bank consisted of a pontoon that the Turks had brought with them twelve months before. Later on, while in the 2nd Brigade, I rode round the outer posts held by our Mounted Brigade, and after my return to the 1st Battalion, helped to occupy the defences a mile or so across the Canal, so altogether I saw the whole system. To my mind, fighting over the hillocks of the desert possessed many of the characteristics of close-country fighting, even of night work. It was so extremely easy to lose direction and touch.

We were all glad to have the Transport back with the Battalion. The horses were installed between the tents and the Sweetwater Canal, and looked uncommonly well after their twelve months in Egypt. The loss of horses in France through the aerial

Digitized by Google

bombing is one of the horrible features of the war. It is said that our Mounted Brigade in Palestine have with them even now quite a number of the horses originally brought from New Zealand. As a Company Commander, I was entitled to a horse, and I was rather concerned as to the animal I should be able to get. Seeing that the horse that Major Brunt, the first Commander of the Taranaki Company, had ridden was dead, I was, literally, in the air. Having a horse that you like makes a great difference, and I was very delighted when I was given the opportunity of trying Lieutenant-Colonel Malone's second charger, a pony of about fourteen hands called Billy, that he brought from Taranaki. Billy and I agreed to be friends, and we remained so until I had to part with him on joining the 2nd Battalion in April, 1917. He is still the charger of the Taranaki Company, 1st Battalion.

Some Sport, very near the top of the Divisional Staff, instituted a weekly paper-chase on horseback, and every Saturday we followed the hounds over sandy hills, through native villages, across riverlets and any other obstacle the hares could discover. These runs kept the horses and ourselves fit, and were the greatest fun imaginable. At the opening meet the horses were tre-

Digitized by Google

mendously excited, and quite a number of empty saddles showed up. It never occurred to any of the hares to tether a string of camels across the scent. Barbed-wire entrenchments would not have been more formidable to the horses, who seemed to hate them with an enduring hate, and no wonder, for really they are fearsome-looking animals, with a horrid odour.

Leave to Cairo was not unobtainable, and two or three days among the Generals at Shepheard's took the dust of the desert away. It was said that one Colonial soldier, in a frantic endeavour to bring the number of officers of that rank at the hotel up to one hundred, masqueraded as a Brigadier for some weeks, until discovered by an Assistant Provost-Marshal. Some of the men preferred Suez or Port Said.

Of course, we were training all the time; the Army never rests when it is supposed to be resting. We went through the whole gamut from squad drill to divisional schemes. The older hands, with genuine fear in their hearts, recalled the Divisional days of their first winter in Egypt, and piously "went sick" on such occasions. Certainly the G.O.C. left nothing undone to fit us to meet a Turkish advance against the Canal: night concentrations and advances and defences,

Digitized by Google

with daylight operations, followed by full discussion with all officers present. To the man in the ranks those days and nights were not the highest pleasure; a long, weary trudge through heavy sand, one minute banging into the four in front, the next straining every nerve to catch up. Telescoping was almost inevitable in the desert, with its alternating hard and soft patches of sand. There was not a great deal of room for individual work as far as the men were concerned. The commanders and their staffs were the ones to benefit, but, as is usual with our men, they took a keen, intelligent interest in all the manœuvres. Curiously enough, their first winter in Egypt seemed to make more impression on the Main Body men than the exciting times they afterwards experienced. Their discussion of things on the march always wandered back to those days. I suppose the original brigades were composed largely of youngsters, and the voyage from New Zealand and Egypt itself were their first and most vivid impressions.

After the New Year we were reinforced by a good many sick and wounded from the English hospitals, and by the 7th and a small number of the 8th Reinforcements from New Zealand. At first there was a

Digitized by Google

distinct cleavage in the ranks between those who joined prior to the 6th Reinforcement and the later comers. Of course, it disappeared in time, and one only recalls it because such a spirit, as far as I know, was never shown to the Reinforcements that reached us afterwards in France. I fancy it belonged to circumstances that caused Egypt to impress itself so vividly on the Main Body, and, further, during the early existence of the N.Z.E.F., most of its members had not lost the corners which appear on amateurs in every profession. We were amateur performers, and our awkwardness on the stage did not tend to make the life as comfortable for ourselves as was possible under the circumstances.

At the beginning of February, in accordance with the new policy of giving commissions in the field to non-commissioned officers and sending them back to New Zealand to train recruits, Company Sergeant-Major Bertrand was promoted Second Lieutenant, and Sergeant J. Makin became Company Sergeant-Major, Quartermaster-Sergeant Wood retaining his position at his own request. Shortly after, Corporal Quilliam resigned the Company Clerkship and his stripes, Private E. D. Snell being appointed in his place; Snell was then given

Digitized by Google

the rank of Temporary Corporal. The duties of the Company Clerk on active service are so many and so responsible, that I made it a practice to give him two stripes, with the accompanying increase of pay so long as he held the position. Quilliam was promoted Lance-Corporal in France, and showed great promise as a non-commissioned officer. He was a reserved boy, but zealous and very cool under fire, and, in consequence, had a great hold over his section. It was a great loss to the whole company when he was killed by a sniper one misty morning in the Bois Grenier sector.

Owing to the shortage of senior officers, I had been granted the temporary rank of Major on the Peninsula, and came in for the duties of Field Officer of the Day at various times. The tour of duty involved the inspection of the Divisional Guards, and anything else the A.A. and Q.M.G. might suggest. I remember on one occasion I had to visit the camp of a small unit temporarily attached to the division, of which the commanding officer had placed under close arrest for some disobedience of authority 120 out of a total of 130 men under his command, and the spectacle of the remaining ten guarding and controlling the delinquents was rather ridiculous.

Digitized by Google

About the beginning of February we learned that the idea of forming another New Zealand Infantry Brigade, and thus making a Division composed only of troops from the Dominion, had been approved by the War Office and our own Government. We should thus be able to take our share in the fighting on the Western Front, whither we then knew we were destined to go, as a homogeneous unit. The unit in this war has been the Division. The proposal, subsequently carried out, was to divide the officers of the battalions of the present New Zealand Infantry Brigade into two, and send half of them, with a portion of experienced non-commissioned officers, to form the nucleus of the four battalions of the new Brigade. The latter became the 2nd New Zealand Infantry Brigade, and the old Brigade was renamed the 1st New Zealand Infantry Brigade. The four Infantry Battalions became four Regiments, with their respective 1st Battalions in the 1st Brigade, and their 2nd Battalions in the 2nd Brigade. Colonel Braithwaite was promoted Brigadier-General to command the new formation, and Colonel Fulton, also promoted, was given the 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade.

Of the officers posted to the 2nd Battalion Wellington Regiment, it so happened that

Digitized by Google

the two seniors, Major W. H. Cunningham and W. H. Fletcher, were both invalided in England, and I was given command of the new Battalion until either of them should return. I did not expect to be given the appointment, and it was a complete surprise when I received a message from General Braithwaite to call upon him. He was ill in bed in his tent at Moascar, and a great deal of the organizing work rendered necessary was done by him from there before he was able to get about again. He retained command of the 2nd Brigade until he left the New Zealand Division at the end of 1917, and always had the greatest pride in it. An impulsive man of great energy, with an immense capacity for detail, he made his personality felt through every unit of his command. A fund of human sympathy was responsible for many a kindly act, while an outspokenness, combined with perhaps a certain disregard for convention, made his doings and sayings a source of interest to the whole Division. His first Brigade Major was Major Melville, N.Z.S.C., *p.s.c.*, now Brigadier-General Melville, C.M.G., D.S.O.; and his Staff Captain, Captain Puttick, now Lieutenant-Colonel Puttick, D.S.O.

The experience of forming the 2nd Bat-

Digitized by Google

talion was extremely interesting, and I take credit for a suggestion, as to the number of non-commissioned officers to be transferred from the older Battalions, that was ultimately adopted and proved satisfactory. As far as my choice of them was concerned, I was very much indebted to my fellow Company Commanders, who gave the new Battalion of their best, and I know that the other Wellington officers and myself who went over, were sure that the non-commissioned officers of our Battalion were easily the smartest in the new Brigade. Lieutenant G. S. Hume, N.Z.S.C. (now Major Hume, M.C.), was the first Adjutant; while Brigadier-General Braithwaite had himself chosen Second Lieutenants Browne and Machray as Quartermaster and Transport Officer respectively.

After two or three days in a camp alongside the old Brigade, we moved to a site some three miles east of the Suez Canal, there to act tactically as a support to the troops holding the front-line defences. It was a long way from civilization, and it said much for the energy and resourcefulness of the Brigade and Battalion Staffs that the organization was as advanced as it was when the men began to come in. The 8th and 9th Reinforcements formed the bulk of the

Digitized by Google

drafts, with a good many mounted men and various details from the base. A number of mounted officers were also absorbed. If one were asked what was the dominating impression left from one's experience with the New Zealander as a soldier, I think I should say his enthusiasm. And the 2nd Brigade certainly had its full share of keenness and ardour in those early days. We had little material with which to make the sanitary part of the camp complete, and our Battalion Transport, apart from the few officers' chargers we had, consisted of two camels. Every morning at daybreak these camels appeared with their native drivers, disappearing into the desert in the evening. They never seemed to eat or drink, and where they lived Heaven alone knew. In spite of the drawbacks things soon took shape, as is the way with the Army, and training and organization proceeded apace. It was not long, however, before Major Fletcher returned from England, and, as I was only on loan, I gave up the command to him, and, with Billy, his groom and my batman, went back to the old Brigade. In the meantime, Major Cunningham, the senior Major of the Regiment, had been promoted Lieutenant-Colonel, and took over the 2nd Battalion when it reached

Digitized by Google

France in April. His service on the Peninsula had brought him distinction and a Russian decoration of the Order of St. Stanislaus, to which, after the Somme, was added the D.S.O. My luck was out for once, because, with the formation of the Division, opportunity was taken to reduce the establishment of Majors in a Battalion from five to two in accordance with Imperial regulations, and, since I was the last on the list according to seniority, I reverted to Captain, and it was not until just before the Somme that I obtained my Majority again.

Two interesting events before our departure for France were, H.R.H. the Prince of Wales' visit on the 21st March while we were training and the Inspection of the Division in the desert by Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald Murray, K.C.B., C.V.O., D.S.O., on the 3rd of April. The Prince, in his inspection, rode round each Company without any formality. He sits his horse well, and, while his face possesses that curious attractiveness so noticeable in his photographs, it struck me there was a certain imperious strength that the photographs do not portray. He looks a Sahib. The 3rd of April must have been a proud day for Major-General Russell to see the New Zealand Division on parade for the first time, and the severity of

Digitized by Google

the test that many had passed on the cliffs of Gallipoli no doubt strengthened his confidence in his command for the future.

From the middle of March the Egyptian sun grew hotter and hotter, and double tents were the aim of everybody to possess, while training in the middle of the day was avoided as much as possible. Contrary to expectation, a cool breeze from the desert generally blew during the most blazing days, and did not discount its kindness by raising the sand. It was the sand gale that brought misery into our lives and grit into everything. In those last few weeks the Company marched to the shore of Lake Timsah almost every day and bathed in its salt waters. What a sight it was; at times probably two-thirds of a Division of men in the flush of youth and the pick of a young race of fine physique were there together on a beach that enforced no regulations as to dress. No doubt most of us railed against the fate that was to rob that race of these youngsters in the next few weeks, for it was no mere gloomy prophecy that some would die. As I write, two years after, one could search the rolls in vain for most of their names. The men loved these bathes and were certain that they would miss them very much in France. They were right, and there was

Digitized by Google

never a more popular and insistent rumour in later months than that the Division would winter in Egypt. However, they were glad to move, and, with a thrill of excitement in our hearts, we prepared to embark for the fields of France.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

FLANDERS

WE arrived in Marseilles early in the morning on April 13th. Ruahine Company (Major Fleming Ross), Taranaki Company and some Headquarters details, the whole under Major C. F. D. Cook, travelled by a comfortable boat taken off the African Trade. It was a peaceful voyage with the exception of our second inoculation against typhoid. The Medical Officer, in a genuine endeavour to save discomfort, injected the serum in what the Maories call my *puku*, with a result that neither he nor I anticipated. The slightest movement for five days was painfully punished, and I avoided the company of any humorist, for laughter was to be dreaded. The Company had lost Lieutenant Scott when the 2nd Brigade was formed, and the officers on landing in France were Captain A. H. Carrington, Lieutenants F. S. Varn-

Digitized by Google

ham, G. M. Fell, L. H. Baily (detached for Battalion Transport duties), and Lockyer, and Second Lieutenant E. L. Malone. While Sergeant F. Farrington had been promoted Quartermaster-Sergeant, *vice* Wood promoted Second Lieutenant and posted to the Hawke's Bay Company of the 1st Battalion. Second Lieutenant Malone was a son of the first Commanding Officer of the Regiment, and, on receiving a commission from the Wellington Mounted Rifles, elected to be posted to his father's old Battalion. His war service dated back to the Main Body of the N.Z.E.F.

An explanation of the nomenclature of the four Companies of the Battalion may perhaps be interesting. At the outbreak of war the 5th Regiment, less two Companies, were sent to Samoa, and when the Expeditionary Force for the Old World was enrolled, the remaining four Regiments of the Wellington Military District of the North Island, which Regiments constituted the Wellington Infantry Brigade, were each allowed to be represented by one Company in the Wellington Battalion of the Force. The four Companies were therefore called the Wellington West Coast, Hawke's Bay, Taranaki and Ruahine Companies, after the 7th, 9th, 11th and 17th Regiments, whose respective badges they wore. Unlike the

Digitized by Google

Australian Imperial Force, the New Zealand Forces had no general badge.

Next morning, April 14th, we started on our railway journey of three days. It was more like a gipsy caravan tour, as we travelled night and day, stopping for an hour or two at places determined, I should imagine, by the residences of the driver and other officials. Sometimes we would stop in one of the larger French railway yards in the darkness of night that was only broken by the glare from the locomotives; at other times, perhaps in the early morning, our spell would be by country lanes. Then the safe side of the train would be lined with men shaving in front of mirrors placed on the footboards of the carriages; the lucky ones were able to persuade the engine driver to give them hot water for the process; we carried our rations and were given tea at the halts, but an hour by a railway buffet or a small village enabled us to emulate the locust of Egypt. The train was made up of ordinary carriages, and we turned them into sleepers as best we could. Major Cook was so tall that of necessity he was given one side to himself; my fate was always to share the other side with the Doctor. We had no accidents, and no absentees at the end of the trek, which

Digitized by Google

was perhaps lucky, as no whistle was ever blown preparatory to the train starting: it simply moved on.

We gradually crept north; around the outskirts of Paris, through Amiens, Boulogne and Calais, until, with lights shaded, we reached Steenbecque, a few miles beyond Hazebrouck. In a drizzling rain we fell in, in the station yard, and, under our Interpreter's guidance, scattered ourselves by Sections and Platoons among the farmhouses in the area of Morbecque allotted to the Company. The last Section was housed an hour after midnight, and we then called up the two ladies whose house had been opened to the Taranaki officers.

It was our first practical experience of billeting anywhere, although we had studied its theory and lectured the men on the art. Billeting is the attraction, or perhaps the solace, of the fighting in Flanders. A tent is a lifeless abode, has nothing human about it, is always the same. But a billet may be anything from an empty ruin to a brewery, its owners may be churlish or ready to cook for you, and the village may be deserted or possess alluring Estaminets without number. "Billeting parties will report at Headquarters," was always a welcome order; it meant a move some-

Digitized by Google

where, either out of the line or on the way back to it, and a change is a change, whether from good to bad. Without the constant moves, the infantry soldier would have found his hard lot well nigh unbearable. With rare exceptions, our men behaved very well in billets, and were popular with the French. Unkind people might say their extra pay assured them a welcome from thrifty peasants whose profits and happiness were measured in sous, but I like to think that their honesty and high standard of conduct also earned a smile for the New Zealand hats when their wearers swung into a village at the end of a day's march. It was a standing order that all claims by the owners for any small damage to property should be settled before the departure of troops, and certainly such claims never erred on the side of timidity, but Monsieur le Maire and the Interpreter cut them down pretty ruthlessly; however, I suppose the British Government was considered to be well able to afford it all.

The Billeting Party, consisting of the Battalion Billeting Officer, whose principal other duty was generally Intelligence, and a Non-Commissioned Officer from each Company, would go ahead by twenty-four hours, or less, on bicycle or by train, and, meeting

Digitized by Google

the Brigade Staff Captain in the Area, would receive a note of the district allotted to the Battalion. The officer would divide it up amongst the four Companies and Headquarters, whose Non-Commissioned Officers in turn distributed their Companies in the sub-areas. As troops had been billeted in most parts of the country, the Mayor's records of the holding capacity of the houses and barns were reliable and facilitated the work very much. The Mayoral records, however, took no account of the seasons, and after the harvest the barns were unavailable for billeting. Probably the party would finish just in time to meet the Battalion and guide the Companies to their quarters. The ideal billets for a Company included one for its Headquarters, that is, Officer Commanding, Second in Command, Sergeant-Major, Quartermaster-Sergeant, and his Assistant Q.M.S., Clerk and Runner, and the other officers with their batmen, the Mess Cook; and one each for the four Platoons at no great distance from Headquarters or from each other. If they were all fairly close together, the Company travelling kitchen or "cooker," as it is called, could cook for all Platoons; otherwise, the dixies would be distributed, and, with their one cook apiece, and an assistant

Digitized by Google

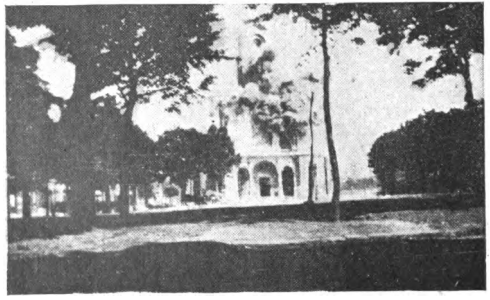
borrowed from one of the Sections for the time being, the Platoons did their own cooking. Of course, if the billets were very scattered, the Platoon Officers would billet with their men; on such occasions they generally managed to find a spare room in the house kept *pour l'officier*.

After a stay of a few days at Morbecque, the Company moved to "ideal" billets at Steenbecque, a mile or two away, where we remained for three weeks' training. There, Company Headquarters were in the château of a widow. Madame's son was home on leave from Verdun; and to an afternoon party in his honour, at which one of the guests was a retired French Colonel with numerous decorations, she invited one of my subalterns, who had a habit of becoming a great favourite with everyone, including his men. The household cellar, I may say, was a generous one, and, in spite of his lack of French, the subaltern managed to convey to the Colonel his desire to know the source of the decorations, but unfortunately received the impression, in return, that most of them had been won by jumping off the pier at Ostend to save trippers out of their depth. Not that it mattered much until later in the afternoon my officer endeavoured to show how clearly he under-

Digitized by Google

A Battalion travelling kitchen.

A digger's dugout in the trenches in Flanders.



Notre Dame, Armentières, 18th July, 1916.

Digging a strong point.

[*To face p.* 76.

Digitized by Google

Duke of Connaught's inspection in Bailleul.

Wounded prisoners coming down Wulverghem-Messines road, 1917

Prisoners repairing Wulverghem-Messines road, June 7th, 1917.

Looking east at east edge of town on Warneton road.

Digitized by Google

stood things by giving a graphic imitation of swimming, first the breast and then the overarm strokes, I am afraid rather disconcerting the gallant old Colonel.

In good billets and given fine weather, a Company makes rapid progress in its training. We had a very interesting Inter-Platoon competition. No. 9 Platoon (Lieutenant Lockyer) won both physical drill and rifle exercises events, eventually pulling off the former at the Battalion test; while No. 11 Platoon (Lieutenant Fell) won the route marching. This Platoon had a Sergeant who set an excellent pace, and possessed only one man who could not keep step. There are always one or two men in a Platoon who, unfortunately, have no sense of time or some other kindred mental defect, and who find it an impossibility to follow the regular pace of their fellows. The result is a conscious or unconscious irritation to all but the offender, as regularity would seem to be essential to our brains. To anyone riding behind the Platoon, the head and shoulders of the one out of time with the rest were most apparent.

The French spring, to men who had spent eighteen months in barren places, was as clear waters to the thirsty soul. The Miniature Rifle Range was situated in a field at

Digitized by Google

the foot of one of those wooded hillocks that further east would perhaps have been the scene of many a desperate struggle, but here in April was canopied with glorious green. Its people included a cuckoo, whose notes were new to us. It was on that range that Major Cook, of our Battalion, in charge of the Musketry Instruction, objected to "Right-oh!" as a classical word of command to commence firing. His greatest ambition was that we should do everything as well as it was humanly possible, and he exacted the same standard from himself.

In the middle of the merry month of May, we moved up to the trenches by way of Estaires and Armentières, taking over a Sector from the 7th Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment on the night of the 13th. Armentières was even then a dead city, and grass grew in some of its streets. Pompeii had been dead so long that one was not very impressed, but here was a city in which had lived 30,000 people but a few months ago. Now, one's footsteps on the pavements echoed through the roofless and windowless buildings on either side. In some streets a few of the inhabitants remained, making a very good living out of the troops, but they were eventually driven away by the bombardment of 1917.

Digitized by Google

The Brigade in Reserve was quartered in the town, and, by good fortune, my Company Headquarters were placed in a large house belonging to a Frenchman, whose name I recollect seeing on cotton reels in the old days. An old caretaker and his wife looked after the house and very beautiful grounds. What enjoyment we found in its green lawns and shady paths on returning from the trenches! A hot bath, a change of clothes, and a stroll through the gardens were happiness indeed.

Gallipoli had not prepared us for the trenches of Flanders. At the outskirts of the town, by the railway, we dived into a neatly duck-walked trench that led us to the front line some two miles away. Its sunken route lay mostly through overgrown fields, incidentally passing by an asylum, over a road, and through a graveyard. It was a respectable entrance known at its top end as Lothian Avenue, but, to speak plainly, Localities 1, 2 and 3, which the Battalion took its turn at holding for the next month or two, were disreputable to a degree; merely breastworks and parados of mud, for the sandbags had almost disappeared, with pools of filthy water in front and behind. In the localities themselves, earth dug-outs leaned drunkenly against the

Digitized by Google

parapets. The pools sheltered tins and various kinds of other rubbish that had escaped the vigilant eyes of a succession of non-commissioned officers, and rats were everywhere, thin and fat, old and young. North and south the mud walls stretched as far as the eye could see, and across the paddock called No Man's Land a similar breastwork faced ours at a distance ranging from under 100 yards in some places to over 300 yards in others. And in these front-line trenches or others alike, in support and reserve trenches, and in billets in rear, the Division spent the next eleven months, excepting, of course, three weeks at the Somme, and the four weeks' training prior to that battle.

It was a stationary form of warfare. All the domestic arrangements were fixed. The transport brought rations up to Battalion Headquarters every evening, and one's Quartermaster-Sergeant followed with the daily paper and the letters. We cooked in the trenches and drew water from pumps or wells, and once or twice a week representatives from the Platoons would go back to the nearest village to buy extra food. Necessarily the sanitary arrangements were rather primitive, but all hands helped to keep the place as clean as possible.

Digitized by Google

A factory of some sort at Pont de Nieppe, a suburb of Armentières, had been commandeered to provide hot water baths, and the men used them at regular intervals. The bath people took charge of washing their underclothes, which were changed as the men went through. The actual baths were huge round wash tubs that held half a dozen men. At Estaires they were large concrete tanks, and at Citerne, on the way to the Somme, an overflow cistern to the factory was used in open air, and the men undressed and dressed in an orchard near by. It was surprising how easily a factory, whatever it manufactured, could provide hot baths.

The telephone was laid on to Company from Battalion Headquarters and very often from our supporting Artillery, and it was only latterly that its use was very much restricted owing to the introduction by the Germans of "listening sets" that could pick up telephonic conversations hundreds of yards away. Any hint to the enemy of a relief of the troops in the trenches being imminent was, of course, a heinous crime, although it was said that a distressed Company Commander, whose relief was interrupted by a heavy bombardment from the Hun Artillery, reported its ultimate com-

Digitized by Google

pletion by the message, "Very much relieved." Its use to ring up the Batteries for retaliation against annoyance from the enemy was quite legitimate, but it was too slow to be used for an S.O.S. call. As can be seen, the opposing trenches were so close together in places that it would only be a matter of minutes, maybe seconds, for a raiding party to get well across No Man's Land. In consequence, at night, our guns were left laid upon certain lines, and the sentinels standing by would simply fire without further ado upon seeing the S.O.S. rocket go up from the front line. Its light had no sooner died away than, with one roar, every gun in our area would let go. It was interesting to be waiting for a raiding party to leave a neighbouring sector. Our guns would not have started long, before numerous rockets would shoot up from the German lines, for all the world like startled animals quivering with fear.

The Sector had been looked upon as one of the quiet places of the line before the N.Z. Division took it over, but I am afraid we spoiled it. I presume it was principally due to the policy of General Headquarters to create as much diversion as possible on other parts of the front than the Somme, and partly to our men not

Digitized by Google

being of the type that can sit down and do nothing. It may be they are like children, and cannot possess a toy without playing with it. However, the Artillery must needs fire every round they could get; the "Plum Pudding" Batteries were tremendously proud of what they could do, and of course there was no better weapon than the Stokes Mortar, for which, unfortunately, there was unlimited ammunition, so, between them all, home was no longer like home. The German could not allow it to go without retaliation, but he got more than he gave.

The three Brigades of the Division made a great many raids in the months before the Somme. The 1st Battalion, Wellington Regiment, carried out a very successful one in the early morning of the 2nd July, made under the Adjutant, Captain A. B. McColl, who, to our great grief, was killed by a machine-gun bullet when the raid was practically all over. He had returned to our trenches safely, and went back again, with unselfish courage, to help the stretcher-bearers in No Man's Land. The plan was carefully laid, and the party of four officers (Captain McColl, Lieutenant C. B. Lockyer, Second Lieutenant S. G. Guthrie and Second Lieutenant R. Wood) and seventy-six other ranks, chosen from all the Companies of the

Digitized by Google

Battalion, had been withdrawn from the line for several weeks' special training. Before midnight all moved silently out of a sally-port in the breastwork and took up a position in front of the point in the German trench that had been selected for assault. Precisely at 12.30 a.m. our artillery and medium (Plum Puddings) and light (Stokes) Trench Mortars opened a devastating fire on the trench and wire in front of it, the bombardment lasting twenty minutes. The trench mortars then ceased firing and the artillery lifted on to the back trenches. The guns were so laid that the exploding shells formed a semicircular wall of fire, technically known as "a box barrage," to prevent reinforcements being sent from the rear to assist the garrison of the trenches enclosed in the barrage. Directly the preliminary bombardment finished, the party rushed across the broken wire, and sections of it entered the trench. The remainder stayed in No Man's Land to act as covering parties against disturbance from the flanks and to take charge of prisoners handed over the parapet. The garrison seemed to be dazed with our bombardment and offered little resistance. Ten were made prisoners, and all of the remainder that could be seen were killed. Poor wretches, they were

Digitized by Google

surprised with their packs on their backs, and, no doubt, would have been relieved by an incoming battalion in the next few minutes had not our plans decided otherwise. Eight minutes were allowed in the enemy lines, and on a whistle-blast our men swarmed back over the parapet. Apparently the Hun Artillery were unable to locate the point raided in time, because their retaliation, which was heavy, came down on most of our trenches, but happily left No Man's Land free for the return of our party. Our casualties were, besides Captain McColl, one man killed and nine wounded of the Raiding Party, and one killed and four wounded of the remainder of the Battalion, while manning the trenches during the raid. McColl was a severe loss to us. The first report was that he had been wounded only slightly, and it so happened that I was the one to bring the bad news to Headquarters, having passed the old stretcher-bearer Corporal and one of his assistants carrying him down Lothian Avenue. In the breaking daylight he looked as if, tired out, he had fallen asleep with a smile on his face. He was a great big handsome fellow, although in years only a boy, with a big man's heart. I fancy he loved the excitement of a fight. I had seen him a few minutes before they

Digitized by Google

went into No Man's Land, and, as usual, a joke bubbled out of him. Any of us that knew McColl, will carry to the end the memory of a very gallant gentleman.

Raids were inevitable in trench warfare, but were risky enterprises. The one I have described was highly successful, as I believe most of those undertaken by the Division were, but it was not so with all. One, launched with fairly large numbers, was caught by the Hun Artillery in No Man's Land before our own bombardment commenced and the consequences were disastrous. It was suggested that some of its members had been indiscreet in billets, and had given the plans away, but there was always the risk of an enemy patrol stumbling upon them massed for attack and giving the alarm. In another case, the German gunners evidently received early accurate information as to the locality of the raid, and made the return of our people across No Man's Land a costly business. To find the wire uncut and the garrison undisturbed by our bombardment, was probably due to insufficient artillery preparation, and therefore our own fault. In most cases the raids had to be executed at night, in order to obtain the element of surprise and the cover that darkness gives to the Raiding Party across

Digitized by Google

No Man's Land, and, in consequence, shared the grave disadvantages always attached to night operations. In no other kind of work are skilful planning and careful co-operation between the troops engaged more necessary.

The latter part of the three months that the Division spent in the Armentières trenches was so filled with raids, dummy raids, trench mortar strafes and gas attacks, actual and threatened, that it was really with a feeling of relief, we handed over possession to troops who themselves had just been through the burning fiery furnace of the Somme, and turned our faces southward.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

THE SOMME

A COMPANY on active service is like the shifting sands on the seashore; the officers and non-commissioned officers, in common with the remainder, come and go, here to-day, there to-morrow. Fortunate is the Company that retains an officer for any length of time; because with the officers and men strange to each other, its efficiency is impaired and often the men's happiness endangered. Justice is easier when the superior knows the idiosyncrasies and characteristics of his subordinates, and, moreover, there is lacking that relationship, sometimes stronger even than a blood-tie, which is born between officers and men who have been through a great deal together. It is said the French General addresses his Battalions as his children; a Company Commander thinks of them as such. And really men in a body under control have much of the helplessness of infants. Of a

Digitized by Google

necessity they cannot do many things for themselves; they cannot provide their own food or clothing, make or arrange for shelter or baths, attempt to remedy troubles, and in a hundred and one ways are dependent on the care and solicitude of their officers. Their very happiness is often in their superior's keeping, for some men are sensitive, and such a little thing as neglecting, in a fit of absent-mindedness, to return a salute, may be interpreted as the sign of his ill-will, and brooded over. A great many of them have been independent of control before the war and find it easy to imagine under military conditions that their superiors have a down on them.

The Company had its share of changes, and its officers on the 15th September were Lieutenant Varnham and Second Lieutenants McIsaac, Gray, Patchett and Farrington, besides myself. In the meantime, Captains A. H. Carrington, E. S. Harston and W. J. Shepherd had left us for Brigade Headquarters, Wellington West Coast Company and Hawke's Bay Company respectively; Lieutenant Lockyer had also been transferred to Wellington West Coast Company, and Lieutenant Fell and Second Lieutenant Malone had been evacuated to Hospital. I had been to Hospital myself, and in my

Digitized by Google

absence Captain R. F. Gambrill, from Hawke's Bay Company, had commanded the Company for a little while, and Lieutenant Varnham for the remainder of the time. The latter was building upon the foundation of success he had laid in Gallipoli, and was given the position of Adjutant temporarily after Captain McColl's death, until Captain R. W. Wrightson took over, and after that went to the Second Army School at Wisques for a month's course. All ranks were glad to see him return on our way to the Somme, and it was with a sincere feeling of regret that we had to part with him on transfer to the Wellington West Coast Company at the beginning of October.

In later days an endeavour was made to prevent changes, to some slight extent, by appointing the Company Sergeant-Major and Quartermaster-Sergeant for, say, six and nine months, and keeping them out of active fighting, such as the Somme and Messines. It was an effort to secure a permanency of command. The former is a very important person, whose influence in the Company is far-reaching. The Company was very fortunate in having a succession of such men as J. Makin, F. Farrington, J. McSaveney, and C. B. Lepper, as Sergeants-Major. The first-named was wounded on

Digitized by Google

July 18th, while out on patrol in front of Bois Grenier; Farrington was promoted and posted to the Company as a Second Lieutenant, and McSaveney was drafted to the Oxford O.T.C. for his commission a short time before; Makin returned in December. Lepper had gained a Military Medal on Gallipoli and held the position temporarily while McSaveney was at school. He also was promoted Second Lieutenant in 1917, and sent back to New Zealand to train reinforcements.

The Battalion left the trenches on August 15th, and the period between that date and September 8th, when it reached Dernancourt, was spent in travelling to the Somme by railway and road, and in training on the way. Altogether seven days were occupied on the journey. Lieutenant-Colonel Hart devoted considerable care to improving the standard of Road Discipline, and he had reason to be proud of the result. It is a big responsibility moving a Battalion with its transport, and the neglect of such points as the correct adjustment of packs, setting the right pace, care of the feet, use of the Band, and many others, may mean that one or two men fall out, to be followed by more whose spirit of endurance is not quite so high as their fellows, and before a Commanding

Digitized by Google

Officer realizes it, a rot has set in. Route Marching is a severe test of the discipline and organization of a Company or Battalion. A trained chiropodist is on the strength of all Battalions, and a most useful person he is.

In the trenches the duties of the officers were more those of Naval men; they had their regular watches in charge of the whole Company, and their time was so taken up thereby that in effect their Platoons had to be handed over to the Platoon Sergeants. Once away from Trench life, they were able to devote their whole time to their own commands, and both the men and themselves liked it much better.

A halt of twelve days was made at a village, Battalion Headquarters being two kilometres away. The Company was billeted in the courtyard of a château, and as it was much like a barrack square, we were more independent of the weather than the other Companies. There I received word of my promotion to Major. In the twelve days a great deal of training was done, all on open fighting principles; games and sports loosened the men's muscles, stiff from the trenches, for it must be remembered that the majority of these boys had not broken from a walk into a run for three months. The Army games were wonderful. I call them Army, but they were

Digitized by Google

no more than schoolboy games, with no expensive material needed. And yet they called forth all the agility and quickness of thought we possess, and were enjoyed with an enthusiasm and accompanied by laughter that it was splendid to see and hear. The man whose idea introduced them to the Army was a genius. They were the chief means of making the men as fit as they were when they went into the Somme.

The Company possessed a number of men with good voices, and gave several excellent concerts under the shade of Madame's trees.

During part of the trek an experiment was made with Prohibition, and orders were issued forbidding the men to consume any liquor for the time being. Unfortunately, before its results could be viewed with any certainty, the experiment had to be abandoned. There were times when the sorely-tried officers asked why the British Army had not dared to do what America has since done in France, and, in company with Canada, in both of their own countries; but that is High Politics. As in civil life, crime in the Army is principally due to drink.

At Dernancourt we remained for two days. Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Godley, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., inspected the Battalion while training in a paddock that still held its

Digitized by Google

grain in stooks, and wished us good luck. For the purposes of the battle the Division was transferred temporarily from the 2nd Anzac Corps to the 15th Corps. The Army and Corps Commanders and their Staffs retained the direction and control of that long-drawn-out struggle, Divisions alone being moved from other fronts. General Godley, in his dual position of Corps Commander and Commandant of the N.Z.E.F., was careful to show the men the interest he felt in the Force, and generally before and after an engagement of any importance he found time to address the officers and men of the Brigades, and sometimes Battalions, concerned. No doubt in his heart there was the softest spot for the 1st Brigade, which had fought under him as Divisional Commander on Gallipoli. After the General's inspection, the whole Battalion bathed in the little River Ancre, a name that will go down in the histories of four or five nations, and perhaps of more, before the war is finished.

The following day the 1st and 2nd Battalions of the Wellington Regiment paraded together for the first time at Church Service. Unfortunately Lieutenant-Colonel W. H. Cunningham could not be present, and in his absence Major Fletcher commanded the 2nd Battalion. The same evening we moved

Digitized by Google

on to Fricourt, that was to serve as our advanced Base. The scene in the area behind the lines was very remarkable. Every inch of ground for miles seemed to be occupied by troops in tents, huts and improvised shelters, and the roads were busy thoroughfares: lorries, guns, transport, horses and men were thick, coming and going, but the traffic was so methodically regulated that there was little confusion. In those days the Hun had not followed our example of bombing back areas, and we were spared many anxious moments in consequence.

September the 15th was the day fixed for another attempt to capture High Wood and to advance on a wide battle-front. This time the infantry were to be assisted by Tanks, faint rumours of which had already reached us, only to be dismissed with incredulity. However, at Fricourt we were convinced by the evidence of our senses. In a flat near Braye were Tanks by the dozen huddled together like monstrous, horrible tortoises; they were still more uncanny when they moved, with a slow, ungainly gait suggestive of Nemesis. The first view of these Juggernauts created an impression as vivid as any I can recall. The objectives assigned to the New Zealand

Digitized by Google

Division were, firstly, a portion of the then famous Switch Trench between Delville and High Woods, and, secondly, half of the village of Flers, with part of the Flers Trench and Flers Support Trench. The 41st Division was to attack on our right and a London Division on our left. Within the Division, the capture of Switch Trench was assigned to the 2nd Battalions of the Auckland, Otago and Canterbury Regiments of the 2nd Brigade, the 2nd Battalion of the Wellington Regiment being held in reserve, and the remaining objectives to the 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade. The 1st Brigade formed the Divisional Reserve. That important factor in Success, ensuring that every man knows what is demanded of him, was given its due weight by means of Plans, Staff Memoranda, Conferences and Addresses, and such Reconnaissance as was possible was carried out. The remaining days before the 15th were spent in further training and in providing fatigue parties in the trenches, and on the clear and frosty evening of the 14th the Battalion moved up to the outskirts of Mametz Wood, bivouacking in shell-holes in the field. Much to his disgust, Captain Varnham had to stay behind with those kept out of the engagement, and Lieutenant Patchett was detached as Bat-

Digitized by Google

talion Burial Officer. It was an excellent system, reserving a nucleus for reorganization, in case of heavy losses, and there were, in addition, some important fellows, such as Battalion Orderly Room Sergeant and Company Clerks, who were not allowed in action under any circumstances.

Not long after the barrage commenced, good news began to filter back with the wounded, and that welcome sign showed itself of German prisoners being escorted down the road past our bivouac. The Taranaki Company was to be in Battalion Reserve for the first part of the Battle, and early in the morning was called upon to provide two parties, one of twenty-five other ranks under Lieutenant McIsaac to carry grenades, and the other of forty to assist in making a new road from Mametz to Longueval. Then at 1 p.m. the remainder of the Company received orders to move to Green Dump near Longueval and there provide more Carrying Parties. It was, however, to retain its organization, so that it would be ready to fight on the following day if required. A Dump is a spot where food, water, stores or munitions of any kind are collected, and to Green Dump, on the British side of the Crest that looked down the slope to Flers, we wended our way.

Digitized by Google

Marching as on a road was, of course, impossible across fields or in shell-pitted country. The Dump was a scene of activity, with a big Dressing Station close by to add to its importance, and not long after piling some of their gear and having something to eat, two parties of fifty-seven and fifty-one, under Second Lieutenants Gray and Farrington, disappeared over the hill, laden with barbed wire and other R.E. Stores, to build Strong Points beyond Switch Trench.

As I had nothing to do after lunch, I followed in the direction they had gone. The high ground, by Advanced Brigade Headquarters in Carlton Trench, gave a clear view of the Battle Ground, Delville Wood on the right, Switch Trench and the ill-fated High Wood on the left. Flers itself was hidden in the fold of the ground, but the ridge between it and the village of Eaucourt l'Abbaye to the west showed up plainly. The German communication trench, Goose Alley, ran back along this ridge from Flers Trench to the uncompleted Gird Trench that the enemy had partially dug to protect the village of Gueudecourt. I walked over part of the country we had just won. The tide of battle had ebbed, and in front of me a sullen, angry barrage from the German Howitzers was playing

Digitized by Google

on the trenches that the enemy knew by now he had lost. Here and there were laden parties in single file threading their way through the barrage, and, as one could see through the glasses, paying the toll of thoroughfare as they went. In smaller numbers were stretcher-bearers and wounded men painfully struggling back. But the ground itself caught and held one's attention. Shells from our largest guns had burst in it for weeks past, and so closely had they fallen that two men could not walk abreast on unbroken ground for more than a few yards. In the captured trenches lay German dead side by side and in heaps, while scattered everywhere were unburied corpses. Above all floated the stench of carrion flesh.

Later in the afternoon, Company Headquarters moved a little way down the hill from Green Dump into Check Trench. Thence I was summoned to Battalion Headquarters to stand by for orders. A wonderful cup of tea and forty winks carried us Company Commanders on till midnight, when the Commanding Officer came back from Brigade. The Rifle Brigade, with some English troops and a Tank, had captured Flers village and, reinforced by some Companies of the 2nd Battalion of our Regiment, were holding on. Our Battalion had to

Digitized by Google

continue the advance at 9.35 a.m. and take Grove Alley, another German communication trench from Flers Trench to Factory Corner and Gird Trench. Grove Alley lay between Flers and Goose Alley, and its capture would assist a further advance against the latter trench. Hawke's Bay and Ruahine were to attack, with Wellington West Coast in Support and Taranaki in Reserve.

The Runner and I groped our way back in the dark to the Company dug-out, where I found Gray and Farrington. The latter's party had not fared so badly, but Gray's had come under a concentration of fire and suffered rather heavily. Our casualties for the day were two killed, eight wounded, and Lance-Corporal A. G. Ellis missing. Ellis was severely injured in the legs, and must have been blown up by a shell as he lay waiting for the stretcher-bearers, or perhaps as he was being carried back. He was a fine fellow, quiet and modest, thorough in his work and possessing the capacity for leadership. Lance-Corporal F. J. Jones was recommended for his good work that afternoon in helping to keep the party together and assisting the wounded. The batmen had supper ready, after which we lay down for an hour.

We came up from the dug-out into a clear,

Digitized by Google

frosty night, and, assembling the Company, moved up the slope to where the Battalion massed. From there to the outskirts of Flers it moved in single file, winding round the edges of the shell-holes over country that presented no guiding features at night. It was vitally important to be in position before daylight, and the Commanding Officer must have spent an anxious time until we reached Flers just as dawn was breaking. Fortunately the Hun barrage ceased its troubling some time after midnight, and, with the exception of a few gas-shells, our progress was undisturbed. Near the village the Taranaki Company separated from the Battalion and took up a position in Flers Trench, which, some two hundred yards away, ran round the village on the British side. Here we found the 2nd Battalion of the Rifle Brigade.

By a curious coincidence, the Germans counter-attacked our right flank at 9.30 a.m., and although our fellows, assisted by a Tank that was lurching forward to take part in the engagement, had no difficulty in stopping them, it entailed the unfortunate consequence that when they had to advance at 9.35 a.m., for the barrage is like time and tide, they ran into the Hun barrage and suffered more casualties than would ordin-

Digitized by Google

arily follow such an operation. The "Creeping Barrage" had been further developed since Sir Henry Horne introduced it at the beginning of the Somme Battle on July 1st, and in September it was an instrument of precision. The guns of lighter calibre were laid on to fixed lines for certain periods, at the close of which they lifted on to the other lines in advance. As the line of exploding shells moved forward, so the extended infantry advanced. The success of the process depended on careful plotting and accurate gun-laying; the gunners being obliged to shoot from the map. As far as the infantry were concerned, they strove to follow immediately behind our shells, for, of course, the main object of the scheme was to keep the enemy machine-gunners down until our infantry was able to spring upon them. What an unforgivable crime it was for troops to be late for the Barrage, is plain. The Stationary Barrage was another affair —the business of the heavier guns, Howitzers chiefly, who simply laid on to their unfortunate targets until they levelled them to the ground.

Ruahine and Hawke's Bay took the objective without great opposition, although Hawke's Bay Company had a tussle for a part of it on the right, which gave its Com-

Digitized by Google

mander, Captain F. K. Turnbull, M.C., an opportunity of organizing and leading a small bombing party, who put the matter beyond doubt. Wellington West Coast Company were called upon for two Platoons to assist in holding the right flank of the captured position, and from Flers Trench we could see them enter the village at the double on their way to the line.

We remained in our respective positions until the night of the 18th–19th September, when we were relieved. Holding on in trenches is expensive, as the enemy artillery bombard them night and day. During a big engagement, such as the Somme was, the guns are silent only during an hour or two out of the twenty-four. As a rule, just about dawn, there is a comparative cessation of fire. It was a decided consolation to hear our shells sighing overhead on their way to the Huns, and to feel that for every one we received we gave back five. During the time I was at the Somme our airmen seemed to blindfold the Hun and then point out his whereabouts to our gunners, who hammered him to a pulp. Taranaki Company was not called upon to hold the front line at all, but had a good deal to do in carrying and working parties. The faithful execution of such duties necessitates resolu-

Digitized by Google

tion and indifference to danger, and failure entails serious consequences. A Party meets with heavy shell-fire and decides it can go no further with its load, and the front-line troops are left without food, water or ammunition; in such beginnings is found disaster.

The fine weather broke on the 18th, and the march back to Green Dump was arduous. The Companies moved independently: indeed, it was difficult keeping even a Company together. That night stands out vividly in one's memory. It was raining steadily: pitch dark, and, until the flashes of the shells lighted up the long string of heavily-laden men moving slowly over slippery, muddy ground, only the forms of a few immediately in front could be distinguished. Waits were innumerable, caused by meeting troops moving up to the trenches or overtaking others going back, transports and artillery, with the drivers cursing the unfortunate animals that stuck in the slime at every step. At one point we filed past an Advanced Dressing Station, where many helpless wounded were still lying on stretchers, soaked with the rain. Everywhere we passed unburied corpses, bodies of mules and horses and broken limbers, and the Stench followed us.

Digitized by Google

The three days had cost the Battalion in killed, wounded and missing, 10 officers and 282 other ranks. Our losses in officers included two Company Commanders, Major Fleming Ross and Captain H. S. Tremewan killed. Lieutenant McIsaac and myself were both slightly wounded, but were able to carry on. Lieutenant Patchett suffered a very severe concussion from a shell, and was also wounded in the arm and had to be evacuated. The casualties in the Taranaki Company were 11 killed and 33 wounded.

We lay in Check Trench until the night of September 24th; the weather fine. In the interval we reorganized and commenced to train Lewis Gunners and Bombers, as our losses had been heavy amongst those specialists, and incidentally practised an attack by the Company upon a German Strong Point between Grove Alley and Factory Corner. It was the turn of the other three Battalions of the Brigade to make the next advance, but the Brigadier had it in his mind for one Company of the 1st Battalion, Wellington Regiment, to take this Strong Point instead of the Canterburys capturing it in their stride towards Factory Corner. The Taranaki Company were anxious to have the job, as we had been in reserve at Grove Alley, but even-

Digitized by Google

tually the latter course was adopted, and we had to be content to wait for the next piece of work that might be given to us.

At 9.45 p.m. the Battalion sallied forth once more, and this time all four Companies clambered into Flers Trench behind the village. In the meantime the Divisional Pioneers had dug a very fine Communication Trench towards Flers, and, in consequence, part of the whole journey of about two miles was done in comparative comfort. The next day, 25th September, at 12.35 p.m., in clear, fine weather, the Canterbury, Auckland and Otago Battalions of the 1st Brigade captured Factory Corner and a part of Goose Alley. From Flers Trench the attack on Goose Alley by the Otagos was clearly seen, and a most inspiriting sight it was. The men seemed to saunter along behind our barrage as if out mushroom hunting. Apparently, after the attack, that Battalion held Goose Alley from Abbaye Road on the right to where it intersected Flers Support Trench on the left. On their left flank were the 1st Battalion of the Black Watch, who were in Flers Support Trench and Flers Trench for a distance beyond Goose Alley of about 200 yards, where they were separated from the Germans merely by Blocks in both trenches.

Digitized by Google

At 5 p.m. I received orders to place myself under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Charters, C.M.G., commanding the Otago Battalion, and relieve the Company of the Black Watch holding Flers Support Trench and the portion of Goose Alley between the two Flers Trenches. I accordingly went on ahead to report to Lieutenant-Colonel Charters and the Commanding Officer of the Black Watch, leaving the Company to follow on. The latter officer was very complimentary concerning the advance of the Otago men in the afternoon.

The 1st Battalion of the King's Royal Rifles relieved the Black Watch in the Flers Trench shortly after we took over Flers Support, and the position was then that two arms, about 200 yards in length, projecting out of Goose Alley, were held by British Troops, and the two arms coming from the opposite directions by the Germans. Portions of, approximately, 40 yards in the middle of the arms became No Man's Land. It was very much as if there were two Tower Bridges side by side, that, after being raised, were lowered only to find that they no longer met in the centre. There had been a good deal of bombing done on both sides at the Block in Flers Support, and on arrival there I found some Otago

Digitized by Google

men that had voluntarily come along to take a hand with their Scotch cousins. Heavy fighting during the past few hours was apparent from the numerous German and British dead. In the triangle formed by Flers Support and Goose Alley were a number of Black Watch men, shot down as they advanced in a perfect line. It was like a picture of stooks in a field, some lying, others kneeling, and one even standing in the rigid stillness of death.

At 2.55 a.m. orders came from Lieutenant-Colonel Charters that the K.R. Rifles were advancing further along Flers Trench, and that we were to occupy any of Flers Support in front of us which was unoccupied or weakly held by the enemy. At zero time, Lance-Corporal T. McGuire, with No. 11 Platoon Bombers, reconnoitred the Block, and, by the light of the German flares, saw that both the trench and surrounding shell-holes were fully manned for defence. His reconnaissance was confirmed by Lieutenant Gray, who reported that they must have been the originals of one of Bairnsfather's drawings, with their round caps, staring eyes and hair standing on end. The Englishmen met with little resistance, and occupied 150 yards more of Flers Trench and half of a communication trench that joined up the

Digitized by Google

two. They thus threatened the rear of the enemy in front of us, and so helped us in the work of next evening. Our efforts were confined to directing Stokes Mortar fire on to the Block, with some result as we discovered later.

The Company diary, under date September 26th, says: " All night and during next day the Germans bombarded us intermittently with H.E. At 12.30 p.m. an attack was commenced by English or Canadian Troops on our extreme left, and the bombardment of our position by the enemy was intensified, Acting Sergeant-Major Dawson and Private Howell being killed, and Private Parker (Company Runner) wounded. We continued work, cleaning up and deepening trenches. Intermittent bombardment by High Explosive continued all day, and in the afternoon one shell killed Corporal C. A. Rogers, Lance-Corporal Otto and Private Ford, wounding Second Lieutenant Gray." Corporal Rogers had been recommended for the Military Medal for his work during the first few days of the battle, and his death was a severe loss to the Company.

Later in the afternoon I received permission to co-operate fully in a further advance along Flers Trench contemplated by our neighbours. At 6.30 p.m. our

Digitized by Google

Barrage came down, and No. 11 Bombers, under Lance-Corporal McGuire, followed by the rest of No. 11 Platoon, the whole under Sergeant A. Quinlan, had no trouble in working down Flers Support, driving the enemy beyond its junction with the communication trench, part of which had been taken by the K.R.R. in the morning. There they encountered a well-defended strong point, and carried it with bombs, the garrison retiring further down the trench to another communication trench some distance away. As the Rifles, however, met with strong opposition and could not advance, Quinlan, in obedience to orders, withdrew to the first communication trench, put in a fresh block and established posts. As the Company was limited to one recommendation for this affair, Quinlan and McGuire tossed up for it (a highly irregular proceeding), and the latter won. In due course he was decorated with the Military Medal.

The Company was relieved at midnight by C Company of the 4th Battalion of the N.Z.R.B., and in the clear moonlight moved down Flers Support Trench as far as the valley and then turned to the left up North Road, to where it crosses Abbaye Road. Here we lay down on our waterproof sheets

Digitized by Google

on the bare, frosty ground until dawn. The men were so tired with want of sleep that they dropped off in an instant, and it was a difficult matter to wake them an hour or two later. The Sergeant-Major had to steel his heart to post sentries over the Company while it slept. Lack of sleep is no doubt one of the most serious of conditions that make a modern battle so exhausting to the troops.

We had now left the Otagos and come under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Young, C.M.G., D.S.O., whose Battalion (1st Battalion Canterbury Regiment) was to advance later on in the day (September 27th) from Factory Corner against Gird Trench. Irish Troops were advancing on his right, and on his left the 1st Battalion Auckland Regiment, and the 1st Battalion Otago Regiment had orders to attack the Gird Trench to its junction with Goose Alley and the remaining portion of Goose Alley, held by the enemy. My orders were to move up from North Road with three Platoons, and occupy the Assembly Trenches vacated by the Canterbury men when they advanced to attack: we would there be available as a reserve in Lieutenant-Colonel Young's hands.

At dawn a very sleepy body of men moved

Digitized by Google

further along the Road, and occupied a Strong Point and some dug-outs in the bank on one of its sides. My Headquarters were in a German deep dug-out. By the steps leading into it lay an Aucklander, who, evidently on his way to the Dressing Station on the 25th, could go no further and lay down to die. He wore the ribbons of the King's and Queen's South African Medals, and looked as if dying had been no grief to him. I cut a button off his tunic and have worn it ever since as a talisman. As it was No. 11 Platoon's turn to remain in reserve, the leaders of Nos. 9, 10 and 12, Lieutenant McIsaac, Sergeant R. W. Richardson, and Corporal G. J. Highly and myself reported to Lieutenant-Colonel Young at his Headquarters in the Main Building at Factory Corner and received our instructions. It is true the Main Building was only a shadow of its former self, but its supremacy in the tiny village was now unchallenged. The guns had sided with it, and the other houses were brick heaps. Lieutenant Farrington's lot was to remain behind with No. 11, and at 2.15 p.m., at which moment all the guns in Picardy seemed to speak, the rest of us hurried through the German Barrage to Factory Corner as fast as our legs would carry us, expecting every tenth of a second

Digitized by Google

to be our last. As No. 10 Platoon was assembling, an enemy shell burst amongst it, but Sergeant Richardson kept his men together and got away to time. Our casualties on this occasion, although heavy enough, were light under the circumstances. The Canterbury Battalion took its objectives with a dash that was quite its own, and we were not called upon except to assist in digging trenches and evacuating the wounded. The position on the right was also good, but on the left the Auckland and Otago Battalions were unable to carry the whole of their objectives, leaving in the hands of the Germans a triangle of which the apex was the junction of Gird Trench and Goose Alley, and two sides were portions of those trenches. These Battalions met with uncut wire, and, coming under a murderous machine-gun fire from the direction of Eaucourt l'Abbaye and Warlencourt, suffered heavy casualties. That evening Ruahine and Hawke's Bay Companies moved into Goose Alley, the former, after dark, being sent over the open to the right to occupy Gird Trench east of its junction with Goose Alley. Battalion Headquarters also shifted to North Road, and Wellington West Coast Company to a sunken road between North Road and the Triangle. A

Digitized by Google

further attempt was contemplated for that night to carry the Triangle, but some of the troops that were to take part in it did not arrive in time, and the attack was cancelled. A Tank was also to be a combatant, and McIsaac and Farrington spent a most uncomfortable night at the Cross Roads at Factory Corner waiting to guide it to the Assembly Point. However, no Tank appeared. Next day Lieutenant-Colonel Hart, to whom these operations had been entrusted, reconnoitred the position and reported to Brigade that the Triangle had a saucer formation and was untenable by either side. On his recommendation, the idea of further action was abandoned, but the existing positions were consolidated and connected up by new trenches.

We were relieved at 8.30 p.m. on the 28th, and, collecting No. 11 Platoon in North Road, and reporting to Lieutenant-Colonel Hart, under whose orders we came once more, we made back to Green Dump and Carlton Trench. It was understood that the Division was now to be relieved, and our spirits ran high. I am afraid that troops who ask to be sent back into the encounter are uncommon. Go anywhere they are asked, they will, and without a murmur, but once their job is done and their faces turned in

Digitized by Google

a direction away from the conflict, the feeling is one of intense relief from a strain to which even the steadiest nerves must confess. Our hopes, however, were disappointed, and three days later we went back into the trenches: this time only for twenty-four hours, and, when we were finally relieved by the 26th Battalion of the City of London Fusiliers in the early morning of the 4th October, we marched right out to Pommiers Redoubt. The weather was getting steadily worse, and the awful state of the ground made the march to the trenches and out again very trying. The last few miles were leagues to me as I had been granted special leave to England, and it was only an hour or two after the Company reached Pommiers Redoubt that I handed it over to Captain W. H. Hawkins and departed.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

SAILLY

I REJOINED the Battalion on October 15th in the Cordonnerie Sector, full of the usual "After leave depression," accentuated by the fact that the period of leave was increased to from eight to ten days while I was on the way back. It was a Sector with a frontage of about 1,500 yards, divided into three Sub-sectors, and the Commanding Officer accordingly stationed three Companies in the Front Line and Supports and the fourth in Reserve Trenches a short distance in rear. The Battalion held the Line for eight days, and then interchanged with the 1st Battalion, Otago Regiment, in billets a mile or two away. After eight days there we returned to the Trenches for another tour of duty, and this regular life continued for two months until the whole Brigade was relieved and went into Reserve for sixteen days' training. In the meantime

Digitized by Google

Canterbury and Auckland carried on the same system on our right.

We were given to understand the Division would be in the area for the whole of the winter, and we worked on the trenches and billets as if they were our own property. It had the name of being very wet the winter before, and drainage was said to be difficult owing to there being insufficient fall. However, the levels were taken again, disclosing a greater fall than was expected, and a systematic programme of work embarked upon that dealt with the problem from the Front Line back to the River Lys. Old ditches and drains were cleared and new canals dug, and when the rain descended upon us, rather earlier than anticipated, the Engineers were satisfied with the result. The Front and Support Trenches were dry and one communication trench.

On the dug-outs and breastworks, work was also concentrated; cookhouses were built, and duck-walks laid along the floors of the trenches. This necessitated a lavish use of material, timber, iron, concrete, wire netting, etc., but shelter and protection were demanded and the wherewithal was forthcoming. Among the heirlooms of the Battalion Sector was a "Deep Dug-out." There are Deep Dug-outs of various kinds, but this

Digitized by Google

was one of the Deepest Dye, and was planned to hold 250 men at a very low level. There was a hot difference of opinion between the Engineers as to whether it would not crack in the middle, or meet some other ill to which its kind is heir, but its construction was being slowly proceeded with in order to show that someone's opinion was right. In the opinion of many, to concentrate a great part of the garrison in such quarters, so near the front lines, was really laying a trap for ourselves. The ideal is adequate protection against the heaviest bombardment, in a position from which the men can emerge with no delay directly the bombardment lifts, but from this dug-out troops, with arms and other gear, would have taken a considerable time to man the trenches. They are rather difficult to keep clean, and the air becomes more or less foul.

While some of us were busy in building up our own defences and accommodation, others were equally busy in destroying Fritz's. No Man's Land was about 250 yards wide at the most in the Sector, and our Stokes Mortars could reach his front trench. Ammunition was extravagantly plentiful, and the Light Trench Mortar Batteries, as they are officially named, literally blew Fritz out, and his trench to pieces.

Digitized by Google

At first he retaliated feebly, but eventually accepted the position and withdrew to his support lines. And, indeed, no troops could be asked to face such terrific bombardment. Why, I cannot exactly say, but the Trench Mortars are the most demoralizing weapons: perhaps it is that the bombs are shot so high into the air that they descend almost vertically, and a parapet is no protection against them, or perhaps it is the horrid coughing noise they make on the way down, but there it is. Most men would rather be shot at by a long naval gun than a minenwerfer. Our brains became curiously attuned to catch the "click" of the minenwerfer gun, and immediately the sound was heard, all necks would be craned to pick up the little black object turning over and over like a tumbler pigeon as it shot up in the sky. Small it seemed in its flight, but it was really a big shell. One dud that fell in this Sector was three feet long. Fortunately, for some reason the arc of fire of the gun was very limited, and the danger zone could be well marked and cleared of troops and dug-outs. In the Armentières trenches, however, the Huns on one occasion moved the gun up without any warning, and reached our support line, where Company Headquarters and the cookhouses

Digitized by Google

were, and made a frightful mess of everything. And because their minenwerfer was by no means such a good weapon as the Stokes, which can be moved to any position with ease, and because bombs were thrown at him every day literally by the thousand, his front line soon became a mudheap, unoccupied save at one or two points.

"Trench feet," a condition approaching frost-bite, had to be fought very strenuously in the winter months. Twice a day the men took off their puttees and socks and boots and rubbed whale oil into their feet and every day they were given dry socks. It was a familiar sight, the "sock men" trudging down the communication trenches with their sacks on their backs. The wet socks were washed and dried under Divisional arrangements and brought back to Battalion Headquarters every evening by the Transport. Winter clothing was good and rations plentiful. The latter in October, 1916, were fresh and preserved meat, bacon, potatoes, onions, tea, sugar, condensed milk, jam, bread, biscuits, butter every other day, and cheese. Divisional dry canteens, which were miniature grocery stores, were numerous, and extra food could be bought. For the latter purpose the Battalion gave each Company a weekly subsidy out of the Regimental

Digitized by Google

Funds, and the men themselves contributed, say, one franc every fortnightly pay-day. The Platoons appointed their own buyers, who scoured the country for vegetables, etc. Of the winter clothes, the most prized was the leather jerkin, a sleeveless jacket lined with cloth. The men used it all day, and reserved their dry greatcoats to sleep in. If it had had sleeves, its usefulness would have been still greater. Rain is the greatest evil in the trenches, for cold is not so hard to endure. Coke was issued on a fairly liberal scale, and with their braziers and the extra supplies of fuel they procured, from sources peculiarly their own, the inhabitants of each dug-out had their own fireside. At night there was the issue of rum, and later a hot cup of coffee for the men on watch. An important man in the Company was the Gas Corporal, who was responsible that the men's gas masks were in perfect order. We were issued with the Small Box Respirator about this time, the last word in protection against gas; each one was inspected every week, and on the Corporal's care depended their condition. He was also in charge of the Company salvage, the value of which ran into over a hundred pounds a month. Salvage consisted of any Government property that had

Digitized by Google

been abandoned by troops in billets or trenches. The two moments of the Corporal's life were when we left and when we entered quarters. It was a matter of pride to leave nothing behind, but we were secretly pleased when we were bequeathed a quantity of rubbish by our predecessors.

Out of three tours of duty the Company did in the front trenches from the beginning of October until the following January—that is only twenty-four days altogether—two were at full moon and were, in consequence, less anxious. Any movement in No Man's Land could be easily detected in the bright light. Patrols could not be sent out when the moon was at its full, although the Listening Posts were manned. These Posts consisted of little posses, some short distance into No Man's Land, in which two or perhaps three men could lie and listen. The work in the middle of winter was sometimes more arduous than patrolling, as there was no means of keeping warm. In both patrolling and manning the Listening Posts, the hours had to be decreased very much in winter and the reliefs made more numerous.

Patrolling was rather unexciting in the Sector, until it became the fashion to explore the German front line and to prospect towards his supports, and the Company

Digitized by Google

diary has no such entry as that for August 11th in the Armentières Sector: "Corporal Rogers took patrol of six other ranks from No. 9 Platoon out of Listening Post T 71 at 9.30 p.m., returning to same place at 1.45 a.m. Reported everything quiet except a German in his front trench playing 'The Wearin' of the Green,' on a piccolo."

No one was idle, for fatigue parties had to be found and the Company's "Working State" was constantly inspected by some malignant eye on Headquarters. Inspection is the life-blood of the Army. Someone of a rank above your own comes to see your men and your billets and your work and your belongings generally, and politely or not, as it pleases him, tells you what is the matter with them. To be told one's faults is always trying, and one of the social drawbacks of the Army is its constant occurrence.

With the wastage of non-commissioned officers, it became a serious matter to fill places of those promoted, killed, or evacuated from wounds or sickness. In war, as in peace, the N.C.O.'s are the backbone of the Army, and they must learn their work more thoroughly than anyone else. There were numerous Instructional Schools to which they were sent, but none of them

Digitized by Google

dealt directly with their duties and responsibilities as N.C.O.'s, and Lieutenant-Colonel Hart, in instituting a Battalion School, did a very wise thing. He made the length of the course three weeks and trained six juniors from each Company. They lived together in a separate billet, under an officer and two Sergeant-Instructors. In four courses twenty-four N.C.O.'s were trained from each Company, that is six per Platoon, and the result was to raise the standard of the Battalion very considerably.

It will have been seen that the percentage of time spent in the front trenches was small, but even when in the Reserve Trenches and partly when in billets, the men had to march up to the Line every day for work. When not working they would be training or manning some of the subsidiary defences in the back area. At the same time, the changes were welcome and billets possessed attractions denied to the trenches: the Divisional cinema and concerts and the Estaminets, but, above all, football. Inter-Platoon matches were struggles indeed, but battles of giants were the games against the Taranaki Company of the 2nd Battalion, whom we beat 11–5, and against the Battalion Transport, whom we were leading 3–0, with one minute to go, when the ball burst. I was

Digitized by Google

the referee in the last game, and wisely, I am convinced, made no effort to decide who had won.

Going back to the same billets, we had more interest in their improvement, and the Otagos and ourselves made them fairly comfortable. At the Commanding Officer's suggestion, tiers of bunks were constructed in the barns, which were cleaner and more healthy than sleeping on the ground. The occupier of the billet in which were Company Headquarters was a nice old Frenchwoman who sported three large plumes on Sunday. A brave sight she was, on her way to Mass in Sailly-sur-la-Lys. That village and Bac St. Maur, both with populations of two men and a dog, vied with each other for the honour of being our metropolis. The latter had a British Expeditionary Force Canteen, but the former possessed a butcher's shop where you could actually get a very good lunch or dinner.

While in Billets in December, the Battalion represented the Brigade at an inspection of the Division by Sir Douglas Haig. The 2nd Brigade was the only one on parade with its four Battalions, as the 1st and 3rd Brigades were holding the line and the parade ground was perforce the Armentières–Estaires Road. He did not see us at our best, but

Digitized by Google

it was our first official glimpse of the Commander-in-Chief, and everyone appreciated the honour he paid us.

And so time sauntered on, until we found ourselves on the 23rd December being relieved by our own 2nd Battalion and moving into billets in Sailly for sixteen days' training. The billets were poor, but they could be improved upon, and we were delighted to find we possessed a large hall where we could have our Company Christmas dinner, for which mighty preparations were on foot.

After Church Parade on Christmas Day, Generals Godley and Russell inspected the Company drawn up outside the Billet. General Godley spoke to the men, and they then inspected the cooks' arrangements for dinner. Cold turkey and ham, potatoes and cauliflower, plum pudding, apples, beer and wine appeared on the menu, and the Toast List was as follows :

The King	Major Weston.
The Company	Major Weston, responded to by Captain Narbey, Lieutenant McIsaac, Acting Sergeant-Major Lepper, and Sergeant Capper.

Digitized by Google

Absent Comrades	Captain Hawkins.
The N.C.O.'s	Lieutenant T. C. A. Hislop, responded to by Sergeants Pearce and Lawson.
Our wives and sweethearts	Lieutenant Baily, responded to by Lance-Corporal Joshua Jones.

The three months after the Somme were marked by a distinct improvement in the Interior Economy of the Division. Not that the Q. side in particular needed straightening up, but there was a feeling abroad—that came down maybe from the rarer atmosphere of General Headquarters, or Army Headquarters—that there must be no stan ing still, and consequently efforts were made to economize and to prevent waste in everything and to raise the standard of the men's "turn-out." Battalion tailors and bootmakers were increased and more repairs done by them. The old idea, that the men should repair their own clothes proved untenable. In some Battalions the issue of clothes and boots was entrusted to the tailor and bootmaker, who, after all, were able to decide better than most subalterns or Company Commanders whether the men required new things and could superintend the fitting

Digitized by Google

with more knowledge. By that means alone a great saving was effected. The Division had always been keen on salving, and generally seemed to be on top in the weekly list of rubbish collected in the Corps Area. The cooks were persuaded that dripping also had to be kept, for its weight was of golden value; bones and tea-leaves must have been considered beyond redemption, as their salvation seemed to be reserved for base camps.

The 1st January, 1917, marked a change that many of us regretted; to facilitate the keeping of records, the Canterbury and Otago Battalions left the First Brigade for the Second, the 2nd Battalions of the Auckland and Wellington Battalions taking their place. It had the advantage of including the two Battalions of each Regiment in the same Brigade, but the tradition of the two original Brigades was destroyed.

In December also, Brigadier General F. E. Johnston, C.B., was sent over to the New Zealand base camp at Sling to take charge of the training there, which needed reorganizing, and Lieutenant-Colonel C. H. J. Brown, D.S.O., New Zealand Staff Corps, was promoted temporary Brigadier-General and given the 1st Brigade. General Johnston had commanded the Brigade from its for-

Digitized by Google

mation in 1914 and was much liked by all ranks. Although born in New Zealand, he was a Regular Soldier, and had seen service in India and Egypt with the North Staffordshire Regiment. General Johnston had the faculty of taking a human interest in the officers and men of his Brigade, an interest that is generally repaid tenfold by its recipients. Certainly a smile and a pleasant word from the General made the day's work appreciably lighter. He returned to the Brigade in August, 1917, only to meet his death a few days later.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

ALDERSHOT

THERE is a School for almost everything in the Army, from shoeing and cooking to the staff work of a Division, although, until October, 1916, there was none for Field Officers. The Army Council then established the Senior Officers' Infantry Course at Aldershot. The New Zealand Division was not represented at the first Course, but for the second, commencing at the beginning of January, 1917, Major S. S. Allen (2nd Brigade), Major J. R. Cowles (3rd N.Z.R.B.) and myself (1st Brigade) were selected.

The views of different Divisional and Brigade Commanders on the value of Schools vary, but I fancy the objects of the Army Council comprised not only instruction but rest for officers. After a few days' leave in London, we met in Farnborough, and found that Allen was posted to Malplaquet Mess, and Cowles and I to Lille Mess. There were over 200 officers at the Course, who were

Digitized by Google

quartered in three messes, Malplaquet, Oudenarde and Lille. The two former had been Infantry and the latter Artillery quarters before the war. The three messes were each further divided into Syndicates, each of about fifteen officers under its own Instructor, and for ten weeks our interest centred in our mess and our syndicate.

We were invited to bring our wives to Aldershot, but instead of the married officers' quarters in the three messes being available, rooms had to be discovered in Farnborough. My wife and I lived at the Queen's Hotel, and were very comfortable. It was hard to analyse one's sensations on learning of this Course. The war in France has its extraordinary characteristics just as other campaigns have had, and a three months' spell from its discomforts must surely be deemed one of them. Ten weeks at a good School in England *en famille* was almost unbelievable.

The main object of the School was to train Battalion Commanders, of whom so many hundreds are required every year, such is the enormous wastage of personnel in War, but it had Imperial results as well. In my Syndicate were eight Englishmen, one Scotchman, two Canadians, three Australians and one New Zealander, and in others were

Digitized by Google

Irishmen, Welshmen, Newfoundlanders and South Africans; in fact, representatives of nearly every Regiment in France. Strangely enough, one lives rather an isolated life there —beyond the Company officers and men, one meets very few people, and it is only at Schools and on leave that one comes in contact with men from the other parts of the front. From relieving other units, of course, an insight is gained into their organization and methods. But in ten weeks of working together it is impossible not to get to know each other very well. Amongst the Englishmen were a retired Naval Commander, then in the Royal Naval Division, two Regular Soldiers, a Member of the London Stock Exchange, a Merchant, a Bank Clerk and a Civil Engineer; of three Australians, two were Regular Soldiers and one a Surveyor; the two Canadians were a Solicitor and a Farmer, and the Scotchman a Solicitor.

In the mornings we worked from nine until one o'clock, and in the afternoon; at five o'clock there was a lecture. Very often it was not until 2 p.m. that we arrived home for lunch, and generally one or two afternoons a week were taken up with extra drills or lectures. The Course comprised a great variety of subjects, and at its conclusion, when we were invited to suggest any im-

Digitized by Google

provement, few were offered. The Commandant was a Brigadier-General, and his original personality impressed itself upon the school. He was full of energy, and, whether his own methods were right or wrong, he never allowed us to forget that our commands were made of flesh and blood, and had to be treated as such. Men are like horses and require the same sort of handling. One of his exercises, that ran through a long series, was to imagine ourselves posted to the command of a Battalion that had been allowed to deteriorate by our predecessor, Captain Brown, and to say how we should set to work to bring it up to a high standard again. To add to the intricacies of the problem, Captain Brown still remained with the Battalion after we took over, and what were we to do with him? I think most of us took him on one side the first evening after dinner, and told him we would have none of his d——d nonsense: not the most tactful way of approaching him, now that one thinks of it. The Commandant was happy in his choice of Lecturers, who seemed to come from everywhere at his bidding, and give us the latest information on all kinds of subjects. I was very impressed with the standard of lecturing among the regular soldiers. I doubt whether any other profession, even

Digitized by Google

the Bar, would have surpassed it. As a rule they were methodical in arrangement, correct in expression and, above all, audible, in a clear, distinct voice. The Battle of Jutland, by a Naval Captain who had taken part in it, was one of the most popular, and the presence of Prince Albert on the stage to handle his charts added much to its interest. Others were given upon the subjects of Aerial Photography, the Organization of the Royal Flying Corps, Tanks, Espionage, the Battalion Transport, the Campaign in the Cameroons, and many others. Hilaire Belloc gave us one one afternoon upon the question of Man Power.

The General had hoped to arrange a visit to the Grand Fleet, but it was not possible, and we contented ourselves with a week-end at Portsmouth. The messes at the Dockyards at Hayling Island and on H.M.S. *Vernon* are treasure-houses of the Navy's traditions, and the paintings, portraits and plate are historically most interesting. To a stranger it seems as if the Past belongs to the Navy as a whole, while in the Army the Regimental Spirit takes no reck of any doings other than those of its own Regiment. At Aldershot, with the Regular Regiments away, there is little left but the bare walls of the barracks and the stones of the parade

Digitized by Google

ground. The traditions departed with the Regiments. But in the Naval Barracks the visitor comes into the presence of the spirit of the past that gives our First Line Defence its driving force. Thoroughness is the key-note of the Navy, perhaps of the Englishman.

Of the different breeds of the Britisher, the most fascinating study is the Englishman; he is the enigma, the inscrutable problem. We younger branches of the race, perhaps, have more in common with the Celts, as we seem to understand the Scotchman and Irishman and Welshman better, and the Head of the Family leaves one with the feeling of not having solved a problem. The Englishman is the Head of the House. He accepts the position and betrays no doubt that he should. Not only is he our Head, but he is the Leader of the World. He has an historical defence of that attitude also, and makes no actual parade of it: he simply behaves as such. He does not question his own right.

To us he is an old man, we being youngsters, and it is difficult always for Youth to understand Age. The Englishman has the imperturbability of old age, and its philosophy, that places more wisdom in a jest than a tear, and that holds as dross what is attained by questionable means. The old man

Digitized by Google

understands that the game of life is not *what* you gain, but *how*. Many years of life and of luxury have made comfort a necessity to him, and, to his methodical, orderly mind, no happiness is possible unless his own circle moves with smooth precision. But does his age prevent him from grasping the fact that in this time of fierce competition more is required than methodical thoroughness? Does his philosophy make him content to watch the keen energy of his rivals with the smile of one who has left his enthusiasm behind many years ago? And, puzzled, one watches and wonders. Is he too wealthy? Has he ruled too long?

I remember it being said of a well-known professional man that he was afraid his work might deteriorate the more successful he became, and it is a man's work by which he is judged in the end. The Englishman is the Head of our House, and, at the moment, if he fails the rest of us fail with him, and so it is a pertinent question for us all to ask, and to seek for an answer, does the Englishman's work stand the test that the strenuous present imposes? Militarily, Politically, Economically, is he a success? Unfortunately, in the field of battle a few victories have been overshadowed by a long list of failures and defeats. Politically, he has

Digitized by Google

allowed himself to be content, even proud of a System of Government that has left him almost defenceless against an enemy preparing for years to attack him, and that has made it impossible to pass necessary measures for the welfare of its people. Economically, he has allowed his agriculture to dwindle, his key industries to disappear, and his commercial ascendancy to fade. Why is it? Perhaps in old age our weaknesses are accentuated. A fear of Convention seems to be the Englishman's weakness. It is Convention that holds him to Political Institutions that have lost their usefulness. It is Convention that makes him slow to move and so late in action, and it is Convention that makes him a slave to all that is good form. In a vicious circle it makes him a snob and still further binds him to the wheel. Good form is set by the leisured classes, and their lead is followed in the Public Schools, schools that have grown in number and size so much with the increased wealth of England during the last fifty years. They have no inducement, such as the business man has, to put the last ounce of energy into their work, and enthusiasm over their job is not quite good form, although over everything else it is allowable. The impression one takes back with one is that the

Digitized by Google

educated Englishman, speaking generally, has no great enthusiasm in his job. Of course one should not generalize, and there are many exceptions, but it is the standard of the majority that counts. And, unhappily, lack of enthusiasm leads to effeminacy and to a fatal lethargy. However, he is a pleasant type to meet, rather shy, but a gentleman, and possessing a great fund of humour. If I may say so, the Englishman that has roamed about the world, or has spent part of his life in the East or in the Colonies, is the more charming, for he shows no trace of an insularity that obtrudes itself in some of those that have never travelled.

At Aldershot, and, I am led to believe, at the other British Army Schools, no serious attempt was made to keep up to date with, or to forestall by military research, the changes in tactics as the war progressed. With the advance in weapons and munitions of all kinds, tactics have altered, but the Schools have lived in a dreamland of returning to a war of movement as it was taught in pre-War days. The result, certainly, was to exercise our military wits, such as we possessed, and to give us a certain facility of grappling with war problems, but it avoided the concrete conditions of the moment. In fact, the

Digitized by Google

opportunity was missed of modernizing the study of tactics in the Schools.

In the field gallant efforts were made by General Headquarters and Army Headquarters to collect and circulate the lessons learnt from the fighting that took place, but this was hardly enough. As it was, the Regimental Officer, with his Stokes Mortars, Lewis Guns, Rifle Grenadiers and Riflemen, did what Providence dictated to him on the eve of battle, and troops were still sometimes launched against uncut wire and machine-guns without sufficient protection from artillery. The cry was that principles had not changed, only their application, but that was not the solution of the Problem.

However, I had not intended to embark upon a criticism of the Aldershot School. I felt then, as I do now, much indebted to the Course, which came at the right moment in my transitory military career, and what I have written applies, I believe, to all other British Army Schools. And I feel sure that when those very delightful ten weeks drew to a close at the end of March, the majority of the officers at the School were more fitted to take up the struggle again and to eventually command Battalions in the Field. And not the least enjoyable part of the Course was the two weeks' leave at the end.

Digitized by Google

X

MESSINES

THE 4th New Zealand Infantry Brigade came into existence on the 15th March, 1917, and comprised the newly-formed 3rd Battalions of the Auckland, Wellington, Canterbury and Otago Regiments. Lieutenant-Colonel Hart was given the brigade command, Major W. H. Fletcher taking the 3rd Battalion of the Wellington Regiment, while Lieutenant-Colonel Hart's place in the 1st Battalion was filled by Major Cook. Majors Short and Holderness and myself were promoted Seconds in Command of the 3rd, 1st and 2nd Battalions respectively. The new Brigade was mobilized at Codford, and in the short space of two months embarked for France. Varnham was given accelerated promotion and the command of the Hawke's Bay Company of the 3rd Battalion. Mixed feelings accompany promotion, and I was very sorry to leave my old company. We had been a long time

Digitized by Google

together, and ties had formed which were hard to break.

I left London on the 3rd April, and on arrival at Steenwerck reported to the D.A.A. and Q.M.G. and then to Brigadier-General Brown, spending the night at the Quartermaster's Stores of the 1st Battalion. The 2nd Battalion was at that time in Reserve in Ploegsteert Wood, and on the morning of the 5th I rode up through the wood, past Red Lodge and Hyde Park Corner, and leaving Billy at the bottom of the Strand walked up its duck-walked path to Creslow House. The sorrow of parting with the 1st Battalion was enhanced by losing the pony, but Lieutenant-Colonel Cook did not feel justified in letting him go. The Corporal of the 2nd Battalion Transport, however, was riding a chestnut mare that Captain Radcliffe of the A.S.C. had brought from New Zealand, and kindly offered her to me. I was very glad to have her, and we also became good friends.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham was at the Officers' Rest-house at La Motte, and I took over the command from Captain Jardine, who then left for the Aldershot course. That afternoon we relieved 2nd Canterbury, the Reserve Battalion in the adjoining Douve sector, a Battalion of the

Digitized by Google

11th Australian Brigade, taking our place, and next day occupied the left half of the front line in the sector, the whole of which had been held until then by the 1st Battalion, Canterbury Regiment. The 1st Battalion, Auckland Regiment, was on our right, and a Battalion of the 25th Division on our left. Our Battalion Headquarters were in McBride's Mansions, a comfortable row of dug-outs, and Auckland's were in La Plus Douve Farm. Our residence possessed the advantage of not being easily observed, and we were never shelled while occupying it.

The sector faced, or rather was overlooked by, the remnants of the Village of Messines, still clinging to the Ridge to which it gave its name, and it was not long before we learned that in the coming offensive the task allotted to the N.Z. Division was to capture that village. It was curious, returning to France at the beginning of 1917 : the offensive was in the air. No longer were the same old trenches to be our everlasting home, they were now *pieds-à-terre*, and next winter we should camp in fresh ground, as we hoped, far ahead of the present battle zone. For the moment there was work, more than enough, in making ready for the blows we were to deal the Hun.

Our right boundary was to be the River

Digitized by Google

Douve, and our left beyond the Wulverghem–Messines Road, both of which crossed No Man's Land at right angles to the two opposing lines of Trenches. Across the Wulverghem–Messines Road on our left, the trenches swung back almost at right angles, followed the Road for a little way, and then turned away sharply towards Wytschaete. On our left front the little River Steenbecque, there, in the middle of No Man's Land, ran through the Road towards our right and bent back until it entered our line, ultimately emptying itself into the Douve. From the point where the Steenbecque struck it, to the Wulverghem–Messines Road, our front line was not parallel to the Boche Trenches, and it was therefore decided to dig a new trench in No Man's Land which would give us a jumping-off place on the correct alignment. With a large body of assaulting troops it is of great importance that they do not have to change direction during an attack, and that they all have approximately the same distance to travel. The contemplated trench would run from where the Steenbecque entered our front line to a point on the Wulverghem–Messines Road, about 200 yards from our present line, and would give an additional advantage in enabling us to overlook the bed

Digitized by Google

of the Steenbecque River from its parapet. As it was, the ground sloped steeply down to the stream which divided us from the enemy, and then still more steeply up to Messines, thus obscuring the River Banks from our view.

It was no use disguising the fact that it was a ticklish business. The Engineers had to peg the site of the new Trench at night, and, immediately after dark on the evening appointed, to tape it out. The working party of about 400 men would then be silently marshalled on to the tapes and work commenced. The party would, of course, be protected by outposts, who would not be withdrawn until the work was completed; of necessity the job had to be carried through in one night. The danger lay in discovery by the enemy while the work was in progress. No doubt his guns were laid on No Man's Land at night, and on a single signal from his sentries they would play terrible havoc with our men. The fact that the new trench in its curve beyond the Wulverghem–Messines Road ran perilously close to the German Line made discovery rather probable. An alternative plan was to sap out T-heads from our front line and then connect them up, but it would have been a lengthy business

Digitized by Google

and in the end probably more expensive in casualties.

In the meantime our Patrols set to work to make No Man's Land our own, and to oust the enemy from a listening post he occupied on the road on our side of the Steenbecque. The Post had been described as a heavily wired strong point on maps in the possession of the Division, but on the evening of the 10th a Patrol from Hawke's Bay Company, under Second Lieutenants Bollinger and Booklass, took possession before the Hun arrived. When he came he did not stay long upon his going, but fled helter-skelter. From the careful reconnaissance they made, these two Subalterns were able to supply the Division with correct information, and thereafter we occupied the post at night.

On 11th April, Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham returned, and that evening Lieutenant Keiller, an Engineer Officer, with Lieutenant Molloy, 1st Otago, and Second Lieutenant A. C. Wilson, 2nd Canterbury, pegged out the new trench. Unfortunately, just as the work was completed, Lieutenant Keiller was accidentally wounded by a bomb. On the following evening Molloy checked the pegging, and on the night of the 13th the work was done. The covering party, under R. F. C. Scott, who was now a Captain in

Digitized by Google

command of Hawke's Bay Company, was found by that Company and Wellington West Coast Company, the two detachments being officered by Second Lieutenants Booklass and McKenzie. Captain Scott reported them in their position at 9 p.m., and by 10.30 p.m. the 400 men from 1st Battalion, Otago Regiment, under Major Hargest, M.C., had commenced work. I doubt if anyone can excel New Zealanders at digging, and, with the work completed at 2.30 a.m., the party was clear of the Battalion area on its way back to Billets at 3 a.m. It was only then that the covering party was withdrawn. It was an anxious night, but happily the enemy remained oblivious of what was happening. Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham's arrangement of the covering party was excellent, and great credit was due to Major Hargest and his men. It is no easy matter to lead 400 men in the dark out of a narrow trench on to a task in No Man's Land: to do it without noise and confusion was the result of excellent organization and discipline. The Batteries supporting the sector stood by their guns while the work was in progress, and their Commander took up his position in our Front Line to control them from there. The Hun's attitude to the new trench was mainly one of

Digitized by Google

indifference, although he registered some of his guns on it next day, and shelled it lightly on the following night.

The entrance to the Douve Sector was by way of Plum Duff Sap, a narrow trench by the side of a road that ran down to La Plus Douve Farm, and hard by the gate leading into the courtyard of the Farm House, was Ration Dump. On the 14th there happened to be in the Dump about fifty Plum Pudding Bombs, each weighing sixty pounds, and a shell from a German Battery striking them, caused a terrific explosion, killing five and wounding eleven men. A few days later the German communiqué alleged that we had flown the Red Cross Flag over the Dump, and upon their suspicions being aroused by the number of men about, they had shelled it, with the result we have seen. Of course, no Red Cross Flag had been hoisted there, but there was a Dressing Station some 300 yards away, which probably their observers had seen. However, after that, Ration Dump was an unhealthy spot, for it was shelled consistently and accurately. It was nevertheless a busy place, as the first-line transport unloaded the Rations there at night, and all reliefs were made by Plum Duff Sap. On the 24th April, during a relief, the outgoing

Digitized by Google

Battalions 1st Battalion Wellington, and 2nd Battalion Auckland, were shelled in the Sap and suffered some casualties. This was in a sense unlucky, because shelling, although consistent, must necessarily be intermittent, and while the guns are active it is generally possible in trench warfare to avoid the danger zone; at the same time that cannot always be done and it is a case of "Carry On" in spite of casualties.

On the 15th April the Battalion was relieved by the 1st Battalion, and established itself on Hill 63, with Headquarters at Strafford Lodge, until April 24th. The Lodge was a Shack, probably built by the Canadians, with trunks of saplings cut from the wood on the hillside. Tactically we were the supporting Battalion of the Brigade, the Reserve Battalion resting at Kortepyp Camp, some two miles away. Up till now the Troops in the enemy trenches were a Saxon Division, but our Intelligence learned from a German deserter that the 40th Division had relieved them. The Saxons have the reputation of being very passive opponents, their motto being "Live and Let Live." It was surprising what little interference we met with in the work. Part of our sector lay spread out at the foot of Messines, and the new work was plainly

Digitized by Google

visible to the German Observers in the Village. Yet the enemy made no effort to check it by his Artillery. What a wonderful view there was from the place was not fully appreciated until we took it in June, and could look back over our own country.

An offensive, organized as was General Plumer's, against the Messines and Wytschaete Ridge, entailed a great deal of preparatory work. Assembly and communication trenches had to be dug to protect the troops for the few hours prior to the assault, and Battalion and Brigade Headquarters constructed. The latter were underground affairs; some thirty feet down, with several entrance shafts, and numerous box rooms opening off the tunnels. In later fights assembly trenches were dispensed with, and the men took their chance while they waited. Communications, also, were necessary. The signals in a modern battle form the most difficult problem. The surest method is by cable, buried in a narrow trench, from seven to nine feet deep, but the limit to this is our front line. Other means are telephone wire, simply run over the surface of the ground, wireless, flags, lamps, pigeons and runners. Different engagements, owing to the various circumstances, have proved the use of the several methods, but preparations

Digitized by Google

are generally made for all of them, and have called into being a highly-trained branch of the Service—the Signallers. A Battalion Commander is much indebted to the initiative and resolution of the Signalling Officer and his Staff. If communication forward to his Companies and back to Brigade is to be established, and maintained, it has to be done without delay, and in spite of danger. Most of the Signallers' work is done under shell-fire, and without cover. The runners are in action part and parcel of the Signal Service, and too much credit can never be given to them. The employment seems to attract the younger boys of the Battalion, and their youth is accentuated by the "shorts" which they are allowed to wear. They sport as a distinguishing mark a yellow band round the arm, and to it is attached their Battalion patch. It is because these boys have to do their hazardous work alone that they are entitled to so much respect. When possible, two are sent together on specially dangerous missions, but the numbers available do not always allow of this. And so the Head Runner would wake up the lad whose turn it was to do a run and, handing him the message, say laconically, "Ruahine." Private B. would hitch up his shorts, sling his rifle over his shoulder, and slip out of

Digitized by Google

the dug-out door into the black night and drizzling rain. From the moment he was outside he was in the hands of Fate, and, by himself, he had to find his way to Company Headquarters, perhaps a mile away, deliver his message, and hasten back. A companion at such a time is a tremendous help, but the lonely runner has only his stout young heart to spur him on the way.

Providing the covering party on the night of the 13th did not close the 2nd Battalion's connection with the new trench by the Steenbecque, for on three nights we sent up working parties from Hill 63. Posts from the 1st Battalion protected our men on these occasions. On the night of the 17th, Captain H. E. McKinnon, M.C., Commanding Wellington West Coast Company, with detachments from his own Company (Lieutenant Healy) and from Taranaki (Lieutenant Nicol), dug a drain from the trench down into the Steenbecque, and a continuation of the trench itself. Captain McKinnon had only one casualty. On the 18th the Battalion found 4 officers and 295 other ranks, under myself, to make four communication saps from our old front line to the new one, and the work was done without a mishap. The following night Captain Scott with four parties from Wellington West Coast (Second

Digitized by Google

Lieutenant McKenzie), Hawke's Bay (Second Lieutenant Booklass), Taranaki (Second Lieutenant Natusch) and Ruahine (Lieutenant Taylor), totalling 300 other ranks, carried the trench out further towards the Hun Lines north of the Wulverghem–Messines Road. That was the danger-point, and evidently the enemy saw either the covering party or some of our men, for he opened on them with rifle grenades, and rifle and machine-gun fire, killing two and wounding nine. It was bad enough, but fortunately he did not call up his artillery, and things quietened down. This digging was excellent training for a Platoon or Company. It was done by Companies. The Officers had control of their own men, and made their own arrangements. The consequence was, Officers, Non-commissioned officers and men who would have to fight together were working together. It may seem strange, but that system had not always been followed. Previously, a Battalion would be asked for several working parties, and, the margin of men available being small, some of them had to be found from two or more companies, and placed, perhaps, under Officers who were strangers to them. Moreover, on arriving at the job the men would be handed over to the

Digitized by Google

Engineers, who would take complete charge. Under the new system they would remain with their own officers, who were solely responsible for the work, but had one or two Sappers attached to them as expert advisers.

While the Infantry were digging, the Artillery and the Trench Mortar men (Plum Puddings and Stokes) were busying themselves in destroying the enemy trenches, strong points, machine-gun posts, and wire. There was to be a greater concentration of guns for this show than ever before; the Somme and Arras would not stand comparison, and already the 60-pounders and heavies were pounding away at the German defences. "The Flying Pig," as the largest trench mortar is called, had not been installed, but its lesser brethren were doing great work. And, in spite of it all, the retaliation from across the way was weak. The Miners, too, were steadily working, though of their plans we knew little. We gave them men to dump their spoil, and rubbed shoulders with them in the narrow communication trenches, but there it ended.

And this scene of activity we thought we were leaving on the 29th April. We had relieved the 1st Battalion, Wellington Regiment, on the 24th, and were in turn

Digitized by Google

relieved by the 2nd Battalion, 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade, on the 26th, and marched back to Kortepyp Camp. Two days were cheerfully spent in making ready for the anticipated trek to the training ground near St. Omer, and a start was to be made on the 29th. The Battalion had had no real spell from trench life since Christmas—four long months—and how it would enjoy three weeks of Spring away from the sound of guns, where mud was unknown! But as if to remind us that in the army our souls are not our own, late at night on the 28th came a note from Brigade Headquarters cancelling the move, and next day at noon we received orders to relieve the 13th Battalion, Cheshire Regiment, in the Wulverghem Sector, that adjoined the Douve Sector on its left.

In the afternoon the Company Commanders inspected the trenches, and the relief took place at night. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the whole Battalion was in by 4.30 a.m. Headquarters resided in St. Quentin Cabaret. We remained there until the 4th May, working in the same way as in the Douve Sector, except that we were carrying out plans made by the 25th Division, who were out training. The Sector comprised their frontage of attack and the adjoining one to the north, that of the 36th

Digitized by Google

(Ulster) Division. The weather had taken up, and May bid fair to shame wintry April. On the 4th we changed places with the 1st Auckland Battalion, moving back to Aldershot Camp, near Neuve Eglise.

There was still no respite from digging, but most of it could be done in daylight, as the sector was not under enemy observation. At this time the German for the first time tried his hand at bombarding back areas with long-range guns. We could not blame him, as our heavies had given him the idea, and we had the consolation of feeling that he had suffered badly from our initiative. It was unpleasant being disturbed at night, but our Battalion escaped casualties; unhappily, others did not. Our Artillery resented this new departure of the Hun, and on the night of the 6th the 6-inch and 60-pounders fired 1,500 shells into Comines and Warneton. The following night for five minutes at 8.45 p.m. and 11 p.m. every heavy gun in the 2nd Army opened up drum-fire on the enemy's back areas. They were certainly a series of bad five minutes for him.

On the 10th May the Battalion marched *via* Bailleul and Strazeele to Petit Sec Bois, close by Vieux Berquin. General Godley inspected the Brigade as it passed by in Column of Route. Lieutenant-Colonel

Digitized by Google

Young lent us the Band of the 1st Battalion Canterbury Regiment, as we possessed no band of our own, and its presence was a source of keen enjoyment. Its music lifted the tired trudgers to fresh effort even at the end of a long day's march, and to be near the band was the coveted position in the Column.

We remained in Petit Sec Bois until the 19th, and, with fine weather, some useful training was carried out. While we were there the Brigade held a horse show at Strazeele. The First Line Transport of Brigade Headquarters and of the Battalions is a most important part of their machinery. Its cookers, water-carts and limbered wagons, to say nothing of the Officers' mess cart and the medical cart, are invaluable on active service. There is an immense amount of carting alone to be done in providing for a thousand men, and the limbered wagon for that purpose represents an evolution in army vehicles of decades, and with one improvement and another has developed into its present construction. The Army Service Corps also has four big wagons ear-marked for each Battalion, two of which carry the next day's supplies on the march, and two carry part of its general belongings. In practice, however, the carrying power

Digitized by Google

of the First Line Transport was found to be insufficient when we were on the Trek. The truth of it was, in stationary warfare civilization ventured to lift her head and plucked up courage to again encumber us with what she called necessities. The Pre-War Regulations only thought of a war of movement that would cut down baggage of all kinds to a bare minimum. But the farrier's anvil, the chaff-cutter and the tailor's sewing machine were found economical when it came to settling down in areas for two or three months at a time, and the practice arose of the Division placing two motor lorries at the disposal of each Battalion when on the move, and, as these lorries were generally able to manage two trips a day, all our belongings moved with us. It becomes clear why the wise Commander keeps a keen eye on the condition of his Transport, its vehicles, and its horses and mules, and the competition at the various shows helps to raise the standard generally. At Strazeele the 2nd Battalion provided its share of competitors in all the events, and more than its share in the two Officers' chargers classes. The horses belonging to the Colonel and to three of the Company Commanders and myself could jump, and we all competed. The Colonel's black mare, Queenie, came

Digitized by Google

third in her class (chargers ridden by officers of field rank), and Captain McKinnon's bay mare, Lucienne, came second in the other class. Driver Wilson, with his two chestnuts, won the limbered wagon event. These beautiful animals, with many others of the 2nd Battalion Transport, were killed in August by bombs from an enemy aeroplane near Steenwerck.

On the 17th the Transport moved ahead by road, and on the 19th the Battalion followed by road and by train, to a little village near St. Omer. There we stayed until the 31st May, and in the twelve days had some very valuable training. Extensive manœuvre grounds were requisitioned by the British Government from the peasants, and sites were chosen and trenches dug to imitate as closely as possible the Messines defences. Our airmen photograph the German trench systems from time to time, so that our knowledge of the lie of the land is accurate. The various trenches are given names beginning with vowels according to the sector they are in; Messines embraced two groups of O's and U's, and hence our objectives included Oyster and Oculist, as well as Uhlan and Ungodly Trenches. Maps are then prepared showing these trench systems and the objectives, and distributed

Digitized by Google

amongst the attacking troops. The Brigade was thus able to practise its own portion of the attack under somewhat realistic conditions. Generals Godley and Russell came down to see it and criticize the work, and both addressed all the Officers and Non-Commissioned Officers of the Brigade. In addition to tactics, time was found for musketry, bombing, bayonet fighting, rifle grenade firing and platoon work, and by the 31st, when we turned our faces eastward again, the Battalion was fit for anything.

During our stay the Officers of the 1st Battalion, who were billeted in adjoining villages, entertained us at dinner, and we made a merry party. Our village boasted a dining hall, and the two Battalions between them produced a good share of crockery, and spoons and forks. We sent our hosts home in the Transport limbers, vehicles not designed for passenger traffic, and one of them, taking a corner rather sharply, turned over and shot its occupants on to the road. Several very dilapidated-looking officers were noticed when the 1st Battalion marched past the Brigadier two or three days later.

On the 31st May we marched fifteen miles to Zutpeene, *via* Arques, and the next day

Digitized by Google

another fifteen miles to our former billets. We dropped the Officers and men that were under orders to remain out of the action, on the second day's trek, and they marched away to the Corps Reinforcement Camps near Morbecque. That evening a car came to Battalion Headquarters, and Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham received orders to hand the Command over to me, and himself go to the Reinforcement Camp. He was very disappointed, but it was the policy to leave out one of the four Battalion Commanders, and it was his turn. A march of fourteen miles on the day following (2nd June) brought us to the concentration Camp at De Seule, and after a night's rest and a bath, the Battalion relieved the 2nd Battalion Otago Regiment on Hill 63, with Headquarters again at Strafford Lodge.

The preparatory Bombardment of the enemy positions had commenced, and night and day the guns of all calibres never ceased their infernal din. Throughout Ploegsteert Wood, behind the Hill and on each side of the road to De Seule, the guns were almost wheel to wheel. It was a wild night. As part of his retaliation, the enemy aimed a great many lethal and lachrymatory gas shells at some batteries on our right, near Ploegsteert Village, and with a light breeze

Digitized by Google

blowing from that direction, the Battalion were obliged to sit up all night in respirators. The gas shells exploded with no more than a soft thud, but the high explosive came over with a hiss and a roar and a bang that echoed and re-echoed through the Wood. The guns were so many and the expenditure of ammunition so lavish, that dumps of shells had to be formed at points very close together, and as the enemy shells could not help setting fire to quite a number, the glare and heavy explosions from the burning dumps on all sides added to the luridness of the scene. On the German side also were fires innumerable—one or two villages burning tragically with rose-coloured flame.

The Battalion was to be in Brigade Reserve for the initial part of the Offensive; its assembly trench being the New Subsidiary Line some 300 yards behind La Plus Douve Farm and McBride's Mansions, and thence, fifty-five minutes after zero hour, it was to move up to Hanbury Support, an assembly trench occupied at zero hour by 1st Battalion Wellington Regiment. The two days we were at Hill 63 gave the Company Commanders and myself an opportunity of settling the positions of the Companies in the Assembly Trench and in Hanbury Support, and of reconnoitring the

Digitized by Google

routes between the two points. We therefore knew on the day itself where to go and how to get there. Our chief danger was the enemy Barrage. At Messines, however, the British Counter Battery work was excellent, and when we braced ourselves on the morning of the 7th to dive through a zone of German High Explosive, we were relieved to find it almost insignificant. The Air Service, who can never get all the praise they deserve, and whose work is so vitally important, had assisted to locate a very large proportion of the German Batteries, and our preponderance of metal was big enough to enable us to tell off guns whose sole duty was to neutralize their fire. The result was that our Barrage was deadly, and the German Artillery at the crucial moment almost harmless.

While the 1st Brigade was at St. Omer, the other two Brigades had carried on the work of preparation. We saw roads repaired to our front line, and tracks for Artillery and Tanks completed, and the whole sector seemed scarred with new trenches. Nothing surely could live in Messines and its surrounding dug-outs. Every gun behind our lines and every trench mortar in turn rained their missiles on the heaps of bricks and mortar on the top of

Digitized by Google

the Ridge and on the face of the hill. And yet no sign of life could be seen, and our work was undisturbed. It seemed as safe in our trenches as in St. Omer. Rumours now reached us of mines of prodigious strength—waiting their moment under La Petite Douve and Ontario Farm, Strong Points in the German lines, and Tanks were in the offing, to everyone's delight. Above all, the weather was wonderful.

The 3rd Battalion N.Z.R.B. relieved us on the 5th, and thus gave us a full twenty-four hours at De Seule to rest and to issue to the men all the paraphernalia of Battle: Rations, Iron Rations, Bombs, Rifle Grenades, Ground Flares, S.O.S. Rockets, Wire-cutters, S.A.A. Sandbags and Emergency Field Dressings. That evening the men had a special supper of coffee, cakes and cigarettes, and the Officers of the Battalion also met in the largest hut in the Camp and toasted the King and the Regiment. At 10.30 p.m. Headquarters and the four Companies marched out; the parade states showing:

Headquarters—Major Weston, Captain Goldstein, N.Z.M.C., Lieutenants Treadwell (Adjutant), King (Signalling Officer), Jackson (Intelligence Officer), and 47 other ranks. *Wellington West Coast Company*

Digitized by Google

—Captain McKinnon, Lieutenants Melles, Duncan and Robbie, and 177 other ranks. *Hawke's Bay Company*—Captain R. F. C. Scott, Lieutenants Bollinger, Murrell and Gibbs, and 165 other ranks. *Taranaki Company*—Captain Columb, Lieutenants White, Little and Natusch, and 164 other ranks. *Ruahine Company*—Captain Urquhart, Lieutenants Bolton, Fathers and Taylor, and 173 other ranks. In addition, Lieutenant Pollock and 20 other ranks formed a carrying party under Brigade Organization, and Padre Walls proceeded to Khandahar Advanced Dressing Station for the time being, while his Burial Party remained at the Q.M. Stores awaiting an opportunity to go forward.

Out of W, X, Y and Z routes from the Concentration Areas to the Assembly Trenches, we were allotted X route. The German air maps evidently disclosed the routes, for the enemy guns had our road ranged to a nicety. He knew from the course of events that our advance would be made within a few days, and during the last two or three nights had placed a barrage of gas shells along the tracks. He employed no mustard gas and few lachrymatory shells, and we were able to dispense with the eye-pieces of the respirator, simply using the mouth-tube.

Digitized by Google

We were in no danger from the explosion of the shells, which burst with little force, but one wonders to this day why we did not sustain more casualties from the shells themselves hitting the columns. They, however, fell first on one side, then on the other, in front and behind, rather than exactly where we were.

The Battalion was in position by the time appointed, and a runner sped away with a message to Brigade Headquarters reporting everything O.K. Battalion Headquarters were in a concrete dug-out just off Plum Duff Sap, and we shared it with a few officers of the 4th Australian Division. They had only just come up from the South, and were to go into action later on in the day; 3.10 a.m. was zero hour, and a few minutes' sleep was possible. At zero hour to the second a muffled roar went up, that seemed to die down, and increase and die down again, and then a shake that rocked the very earth. There was a perceptible interval between the last roar of the exploding mines and the guns opening: they might have been hundreds of thousands of dogs unleashed altogether with a deep-toned bay and bark.

The 2nd Anzac Corps (3rd Australian Division, N.Z. Division and 25th Division)

Digitized by Google

attacked the Ridge, having the 9th Corps on its left. The honour of capturing Messines itself was given to the New Zealand Division, and the 3rd N.Z.R.B. and 2nd N.Z. Infantry Brigade were entrusted with the Blue and Brown Lines (1st and 2nd German Lines on the forward slope) and the Yellow Line (Messines Village), in the following formation:

2nd Brigade (on left).

Brigadier-General W. G. Braithwaite, C.M.G., D.S.O.

1st Otago.	1st Canterbury.
2nd Canterbury.	2nd Otago.

3rd Brigade (on right).

Brigadier-General H. T. Fulton, C.M.G., D.S.O.

3rd Battalion.	1st Battalion.
2nd Battalion.	4th Battalion.

They met with complete success in spite of strong opposition, and two hours and ten minutes after zero (5.20 a.m.) the 1st Brigade (Brigadier-General C. H. J. Brown, D.S.O.) attacked and captured the Black

Digitized by Google

Line beyond the Village, with 1st Battalion Auckland on the right and 1st Battalion Wellington on the left. The Barrage again moved forward, and one Platoon from 1st Auckland on the right and two Companies from 2nd Auckland on the left moved out and established five strong points along the Black Dotted Line. 2nd Battalion Wellington in the meantime lay in Hanbury Support Trench awaiting orders. We had emerged from the New Subsidiary Line fifty-five minutes after zero, when the dawn was still grey, and in single file by companies made for Hanbury Support by the routes we had reconnoitred beforehand. A few seconds' wait while the Adjutant made sure everyone was there, then up on to the road along which ran Plum Duff Sap, turned to the right down the Artillery track by the River Douve, then to the left and across country on the parapets of the trenches to our new Headquarters. A heavy smoke fog lay a few feet above the ground, and the unmistakable odour of lethal gas was everywhere. It was no use attempting to voice orders: the roar of the guns and machine-guns overwhelmed all other sounds: one could not even distinguish the explosion of the shells of the enemy's futile barrage that fell near us. The flash and smoke, and

Digitized by Google

dust and débris were seen, but their noises were anonymous contributions to the general din. Our storming troops had not escaped altogether while waiting their turn to advance. In one trench that we passed, lay the bodies of five men killed by a single shell, and close by an abandoned Tank; a little further on, several men of our 1st Battalion had died. I heard afterwards one of them was Lieutenant Fell. Padre Walls chose a spot for a grave that afternoon and buried them.

At one o'clock the 4th Australian Division continued the advance and captured the Green Line (Oostaverne line). Along a three Corps' frontage the same success was obtained. Everything dove-tailed. Due allowance was made for the twists and turns of the trenches, and for the different rates of progress on the various frontages, and the barrages for all the attacking Divisions fitted into each other perfectly. The whole thing was carried out as it was designed, with clock-like precision, and the casualties were few. One gets used to most things but never to the casualties. It is always a shock and a grief to see the lists. If we could only play the game of war for the fun of the thing!

The Pioneers immediately set to work to

Digitized by Google

repair the Wulverghem–Messines Road, and it became once more the main thoroughfare to Messines. A Dressing Station was established on the road near our old front line, and the ambulance cars took the wounded from there. My brother was one of the first to pass through the Dressing Station, having been wounded shortly after his Battalion (1st Canterbury) took its part of the Blue Line. As soon as the enemy realized he had lost the ridge, the guns that he had available opened upon it, but the shelling was not heavy on the 7th. All that afternoon our own guns were moving up into more advanced positions and registering on points the Hun would have to cross in order to attack the Australians. This is why the means of communication from forward troops are so important. To protect them, the guns must know with certainty where they are. The airmen assist by watching our men advance, and ground flares are lighted to show the aerial observers where the foremost positions are. To us the most inspiring sight was the mounted men riding forward. There were not many of them, but they were the heralds of the open warfare of which we dreamed, and of victory. It was the same on the Somme: the news that the cavalry were up and

Digitized by Google

would go through us raised the men's hopes as nothing else did.

Next day we relieved first the 2nd Aucklanders in the Black Dotted Line, and later our own 1st Battalion in the Black Line. 1st Auckland remained in the position it had won, and 2nd Auckland and 1st Wellington relieved troops of the 2nd and 3rd Brigades further back around the Village, and those two Brigades were then withdrawn.

I made my headquarters in a concrete Pill Box called the Blauwen Molen, east of the village. It had been a German Artillery Headquarters with an elaborate telephone exchange, and close by were some underground dug-outs absolutely full of German dead. The Blauwen Molen was one of the 1st Battalion's objectives, and fell to the Wellington West Coast Company. There was an excellent view from it, and we were in close touch with the four Companies from right to left—Hawke's Bay, Taranaki, Ruahine and Wellington West Coast. Lieutenant King was very successful with his signals, and, besides keeping up communication with advanced Brigade Headquarters on the other slope of the Ridge, ran out telephones to the four companies. We had a quiet morning until about 9.30 a.m., but after that the Hun Artillery gave us little peace. It was

Digitized by Google

early in the morning that our Brigadier was killed. General Russell had been up to see him at his advanced Headquarters at the Moulin d'Hospice, and was saying good-bye on the road when an H.E. shrapnel burst over their heads, killing General Brown instantly and wounding General Russell's A.D.C. I had been with him in his dug-out a short time before, and discussed the relief while he finished shaving. It is idle to say a soldier on active service has a career before him. He has only a possibility of one. General Brown's record from August, 1914, had been one of unbroken success, and success accompanied by the good wishes of those that served with him. He was a very capable leader and had a rare tact that was bred of understanding and liking his fellows. In more peaceful times he would have been on the threshold only of his career.

That evening the S.O.S. signal went up from the Green Line, and in response to the call our artillery put up a barrage that effectually stopped any attack against the Australians. It sounded as if nothing could live in it. The enemy shelling was fairly intense and crept nearer and nearer to our trenches, anticipating perhaps an accompanying advance of their infantry. We remained in the trenches during the next

Digitized by Google

day, and late at night were relieved by the 14th Battalion, 4th Brigade, 4th Australian Division, and marched back to Bulford Camp in the Concentration Area. In spite of the shelling, Padre Walls with his burial party carried on most of the day, and we left few of our dead unburied. All of the wounded were got away to the Dressing Station. Shortly after one of the Ruahine Company's Platoons started on the way out, a big shell burst in its midst and killed and wounded several. All that could be done was to dress the wounded, and lift them to a place of comparative safety near by and leave them there. The four Company Stretcher-bearers who were with Company Headquarters did not hear of this until they reached Bulford Camp five miles away, but without hesitation they turned back, faced Hades once more, and carried the wounded out. The Australians had promised to see that these men were looked after, and would have done so directly they themselves had settled down, but the Ruahine stretcher-bearers thought it their duty to get their own mates into safety rather than rest in Bulford Camp.

We lost Captain Scott in the afternoon. Thoroughly tired out, he was asleep in the bottom of his trench, and a shell landed

Digitized by Google

near by. He never regained consciousness, and died before he reached the Casualty Clearing Station.

Our casualties in the Battalion from the 6th to the 9th, both inclusive, were:

	Killed.	*Missing.*	*Wounded.*
Officers	2	—	3
Other Ranks	13	7	124

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

LA BASSE VILLE

THE Artillery spoil a battle as a sport. A wise Commander knows just how long to keep his men under fire, when a few days' rest will restore them to their former high courage. Let them stay beyond the psychological point and their morale sinks so rapidly that it takes a long time to regain it. This depends principally on the moral and mental standard of the troops, and partly on nerves, on their physical fitness, for the strain is tremendously severe on these qualities.

We had just the change we needed after Messines; twenty-four hours in the huts ments of Bulford Camp and then seven days of sunshine in comfortable billets at Brune Gaye. The New Zealand Division had handed over the Messines sector to the 4th Australian Division and was now relieving the 3rd Australian Division on the right. On the 18th the men once more

Digitized by Google

shouldered their belongings and the Battalion relieved 1st Battalion, Canterbury Regiment, opposite the village of La Basse Ville, then held by the Germans.

The Sector was a long narrow one, its frontage only totalling about 750 yards. Between us and La Basse Ville on the right ran the Armentières-Warneton Railway, but on the left the Hun had remained on our side of the Line and established himself in a system of hedgerows. He had interlaced them heavily with wire and, thus protected, his machine-gun posts were strong defences. The system of defence adopted by us consisted of three small posts in front, of, approximately, a Platoon each, under an officer, with their supporting troops in an old German trench near the Au Chasseur Cabaret. That hostel on the road from Messines to La Basse Ville had served many a thirsty traveller in its palmy days: when we first saw it, it served only as a mark for the German gunners and its cellar was no longer a safe place even for a machine-gun crew. Behind that was the supporting Company (Taranaki) in the old German front line, and the two Reserve Companies were, one (Hawke's Bay) in Ploegsteert Wood (Bunhill Row), and the other (Ruahine) in the Catacombs in Hill

Digitized by Google

63. Headquarters were in a deep dug-out near the Post Office of St. Ives, another unrecognizable hamlet.

Messines had blooded the Battalion, and the Companies were ripe for the adventures before them. Adventures do not come unsought, and the officers and non-commissioned officers before La Basse Ville showed a spirit of daring and enterprise worthy of their British Ancestors. The relief was completed by 12.25 a.m., and next morning Lieutenant Simmonds, the Battalion Intelligence Officer, and his Corporal, stalked a German machine-gun on the railway near the village. The Corporal shot one of the crew, but the remainder got the gun into action and the two had to dive for cover. The Corporal worked his way down the overgrown hedges on each side of the Line: Lieutenant Simmonds was obliged to crouch in an adjacent shell-hole until dark, when he ran the gauntlet of their fire and got safely away.

On the left Sergeant Fisher and Private Goddard, from No. 3 Post, while on daylight Patrol, surprised another Machine Gun Post in a hedgerow and shot two gunners, but were not quick enough to prevent the others manning the gun. Although Goddard managed to escape, the

Digitized by Google

Sergeant was wounded and taken prisoner. One of the German prisoners taken by us a few nights later gave the information that Fisher was in their hands, and alive, and some weeks after word came through Geneva of his being a prisoner of war.

Earlier in the morning Lieutenant A. G. Melles, with a Patrol from No. 1 Post, had explored part of La Basse Ville unmolested.

The work in the Posts was very trying on the men. They were merely narrow trenches with no drainage to get rid of the water that accumulated, and sanitation was difficult. In the daytime much movement was inadvisable. Hot rations were brought up at night, but altogether it was not comfortable living. We were thankful that the Artillery on both sides was slackening its efforts. Many of our guns were being withdrawn to other parts of the Front, and the enemy was only too anxious to agree to a reduction of armaments. Our Army Intelligence said a Prussian Reserve Division was opposite to us.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham returned to the Battalion on the night of the 19th, and on the 20th Wellington West Coast Company was relieved in the Posts by Taranaki Company, and went into Support in the old German Front Line.

Digitized by Google

On the night of the 21st–22nd June the Battalion attempted an operation in conjunction with 1st Auckland on the North, the object being to clear the ground of enemy posts on the right to the River Lys, and on the left to the main street of Warneton. Three Platoons were the forces engaged, Nos. 1 and 3 Platoons from Wellington West Coast Company being our contribution. As sometimes happens with night operations, No. 1 Platoon and the Auckland Platoon went astray. Two of No. 1 Platoon sections were separated from the column as it moved in the darkness to its assembly point, and by the time they found it again, zero time had passed, and the Enemy Barrage coming down prevented them taking any part in the show. The Auckland Platoon also lost its way, and it was left to Lieutenant Melles and No. 3 Platoon to carry out their job by themselves.

The main and only street of La Basse Ville runs parallel to and between the railway line and the River Lys. Melles divided his four sections into two parties, and with one crossed the railway at a spot near the Messines Road, which strikes the main street at right angles, at the southern end of the village. The Sugar Refinery, at

Digitized by Google

that time merely a skeleton of twisted girders and broken iron, was situated on the River Lys side of the junction of the Messines Road and the main street. He led his men into the street at this point and fought his way northwards along it. Bomb, bayonet and rifle were used: the fighting was really hand to hand. We learned afterwards from prisoners that there was a considerable German garrison in the cellars of the buildings of La Basse Ville, and most of them, no doubt, struggled out in the darkness to meet the daring enemy right in their midst. It was a great fight, bringing back to memory the way in which our bluejackets in days gone by boarded an enemy ship and swept her decks with pistol and cutlass. The explosion of the bombs, the British Mills bomb being distinguished by its metallic ping, could not drown the grunts of the sweating, fighting men, the groans of the wounded and the screams of those in their death agony. Our men were outnumbered but they were indomitable. They cleared the street, and drove the Huns out of the end of the village to behind a tall hedge that ran at right angles down to the river. Here Melles was joined by his other two sections, which had crossed the railway line higher up, and had struck

Digitized by Google

the Tissage (a large Spinning Factory) at the top end of the village. As they found it impossible to enter the factory from its northern side, they worked around to its southern side, and after killing a few Germans there, joined Lieutenant Melles, who was then bombing the enemy behind the hedge. He very wisely chose this opportunity to withdraw his party. His casualties were severe, and no good purpose would have been served by staying longer, as he could neither see nor hear any signs of the Platoon that was supposed to be working on his left. He accordingly got his party together, and with their wounded moved down the street. There they again met some of the enemy, who probably had come up from the cellars in the meantime; of these, our men killed some, and took two prisoners. No further opposition was encountered, and the Platoon withdrew across the railway line. It was found necessary to shoot the two prisoners, who objected to going with their captors, and attempted to escape. Our casualties were, one killed, one wounded and missing, and 16 wounded out of a total of 42. The missing man was so severely wounded that he could not be moved, and fell into the hands of the enemy. I was very glad to meet him in Walton-on-

Digitized by Google

Thames Hospital in April, 1918. One of his legs had been amputated in a German Hospital, and he was afterwards repatriated. For his daring leadership, Lieutenant Melles was decorated with a bar to the M.C. (the first in the Division); he had won his M.C. at Messines. His senior non-commissioned officer, Corporal J. D. Fraser, and Private Ernest Henderson were given the M.M. And well they deserved their rewards. It was my share of the night's work to be in the Power Buzzer Dug-out near the Au Chasseur Cabaret, and it did me good to hear the account of the fighting from Melles and his men when they reported there on the way back to the Support Trenches. One has a very sincere admiration for the man who, in spite of long-distance weapons, is still able to tackle his opponent hand to hand as they did in the days of old.

In view of the failure on the left, a similar operation was undertaken the following night, again in conjunction with 1st Auckland. On this occasion it was confined to clearing the ground between our posts and the railway, the troops on the right having only to patrol towards La Basse Ville. Our Artillery Barrage was very effective, and under its protection three Platoons from Taranaki Company, under Lieutenants A.

Digitized by Google

T. White, C. T. Natusch and N. F. Little, did the work. The garrisons of several enemy posts were destroyed, and identifications obtained. After the operation was completed the three Platoons withdrew. In the meantime, Ruahine Company had come up from the Catacombs to occupy our Front Posts, and the Taranaki leaders, after reporting to Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham in the Power Buzzer Dug-out, took their men back to the Catacombs. Lieutenant Little received the M.C. for the work he did. I always disliked night attacks; failure is so easy, and a mistake made is very hard, generally impossible, to remedy, owing to the darkness. Success can only be attained by the most careful preparation, and a preliminary knowledge of the ground is essential. It is very much as if one asked a number of blind men to carry out a military operation.

The following night the Battalion was relieved by 1st Wellington, and retired to bivouacs and dug-outs on the slopes of Hill 63. Before Messines the German guns seemed unable to range on the southern side of the Hill and, troops being comparatively safe, as many as four Battalions with details used to bivouac there. After Messines, the losses began to be heavy among the men

Digitized by Google

living in such a small area, and it was not long before the Divisional Commander reduced the numbers.

Our first two nights were absolutely uncomfortable. For the last two weeks the Hun had been using his new mustard gas. Headquarters dug-out, this time, was another rustic shack with a veranda and a charming view towards Armentières, but little protection even against an Army biscuit. We sat bravely there for a time, amongst a mixture of High Explosive and Gas Shells, weeping copious tears even in our respirators. Eventually, however, we sought shelter in an armoured dug-out, a few feet below us, that belonged to the officers of a Wireless detachment operating on the Hill. It was very stuffy, and crowded with officers with streaming and inflamed eyes. We could not bear that for long, and returning to the shack fell asleep in our respirators, to wake up to a glorious morning and the guns silent, for gunners also must sleep.

In June the wood on Hill 63 was wearing a thick, green cloak, so different from its chilly nakedness of April. It seemed sacrilege that shells should tear its beautiful limbs to pieces. To us it brought a feeling of sadness, but what angry bitterness must have welled up in the heart of the owner of

Digitized by Google

the château! The Lodge was there, but I really do not know where were the remains of the château itself. Revenge to us is an unfelt passion. We feel we are fighting for our very existence, but a savage, relentless desire to destroy the invader and his kith and kin, and everything that he treasures, can abide in the heart only of the Belgian and Frenchman, when they see their homes laid waste by war.

On the third morning our Pioneer Battalion moved away from the ill-conditioned place, and we took Red Lodge, which they had made their Headquarters. Work, work was the motto of the Division, and directly we set foot in the new sector an ambitious programme was drawn up. A deep, duck-walked Communication Trench to the Front Line, and new Shelter Trenches formed part of it, and now that we were in Support our Battalion fell to digging. In an underground war, such as this has been, to dig and dig is the soldier's lot. No wonder the Australians' name for a private soldier is "digger." However, our spell of work was short, as the 4th Australian Division came over from the Messines sector to relieve us and we moved once more out to billets.

Before we went, I took charge of the representatives of the 1st Brigade at the

Digitized by Google

Parade of the 2nd Anzac Corps before H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught. The Duke is Honorary Colonel of the 3rd New Zealand Rifle Brigade. It was held in the square of Bailleul and was a compliment to the Corps for the capture of Messines. Many of the trophies of the victory were parked before the Town Hall, and the troops lined the four sides of the ancient square. Unhappy Flanders: the thought must have struck many of us that it was not the first time the citizens of Bailleul had watched from their high windows the troops of other races parading in the square. General Plumer was there, as the Corps formed part of the Second Army, but he seemed to wish General Godley, the Corps Commander, to be the chief figure before His Royal Highness, and contented himself with pottering about the parade ground looking at the men and the trophies.

Again our paths lay in pleasant places. St. Marie Capelle is a pretty village at the foot of the pinnacle on which the town of Cassel is built. Across a valley was the wooded Mont des Racollets, and further Eastward the Mont des Cats, with its summit crowned by an ancient Monastery. What a wonderful view there is from Cassel; at night, they say, can be seen the opposing

Digitized by Google

trench lines marked by the gun flashes, but by day there was no sign of strife, and Peace and Plenty seemed to reign. We lay at St. Marie Capelle from 29th June to the 18th July. The training was based on open warfare principles. Only the morning was taken up, and in the afternoon recreational games were played by the men. The officers were thus able to work in some Regimental Tours, and the non-commissioned officers of each Company had their own schools.

In such glorious weather our responsibilities seemed to rest upon us lightly. The allowance of leave to England and Paris was liberal at the time, and with each officer going and returning one's place on the list moved up. We held Battalion sports in preparation for the Divisional Gymkhana, and later had a Platoon Tournament, to which we invited the Mayor and all the Villagers and gave them coffee and cakes. The Mayor circulated our invitation by putting up a notice in the church porch, and the whole village seemed to make a gala day of it. The events at the Tournament were open to Platoon entries only, such as Platoon Relay Race, and Platoon Cock-fighting, which engendered great rivalry and, we hoped, cultivated the Platoon spirit. At the Divisional Gymkhana the Wellington

Digitized by Google

West Coast Company's Tug-of-War Team pulled into the Final, and were then only beaten by a very heavy Maori combination from the Pioneer Battalion: a good performance for a Company team. The Mont des Racollets provided us with an excellent Miniature Rifle Range, and the Battalion shooting went up with a run: a Rifle Meeting helped matters along. We also instituted a Battalion School for young non-commissioned officers. The idea was that it should be a permanent part of the Battalion and instruction should not be interrupted. Whenever the Battalion moved, it should move as a distinct unit, and remain behind the Line when trenches were held. The demand for good non-commissioned officers is so great that a continuous supply of reinforcements within the Battalion is necessary.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham had assumed temporary command of the Brigade on the 4th July, when Brigadier-General Melville went on fourteen days' leave to England, and upon the latter's return his own leave became due. General Melville was a New Zealand Staff Corps Officer, although originally in the Regular Army. At the outbreak of war he happened to be in England on a Course, and saw service in

Digitized by Google

Flanders with his own Regiment in the first phase of the war. He rejoined the New Zealanders in Gallipoli, and was successively Brigade Major to the 2nd and 3rd Brigades, and Lieutenant-Colonel in command of the 4th Battalion of the latter before he was promoted to the 1st Brigade.

Shortly before the Battalion moved back to the La Basse Ville Sector, Hawke's Bay Company (Captain W. H. McLean) was sent ahead to Kortepyp Camp to train for a special operation that entailed the capture of the Village, and when we relieved parts of the 51st and 52nd Battalions, 4th Australian Division, on the 19th July, that Company remained at the Camp.

The Battalion stormed and captured La Basse Ville on two occasions. On the 27th July Hawke's Bay Company had little difficulty in taking the Village, but the Germans, a few hours afterwards, counter-attacked in comparatively great strength, and drove out the posts left by us as a garrison. On the 31st July Wellington West Coast Company, with two Platoons of Taranaki Company, again seized the place, and this time all the attackers remained and held it against the counter-attacks that followed. This operation was made conjointly with Ruahine Company, clearing the

Digitized by Google

hedgerow system on our left between our Posts and the Railway Line.

The week preceding the attack by Hawke's Bay Company was one of busy preparation. The Company trained hard at Kortepyp Camp, and every evening its officers and N.C.O.'s, in turn, came up and patrolled the area between No. 1 Post and the Railway Line, and sometimes across the Line towards the Village. Two Patrols were out on the night of the 21st, and one of them, under Sergeant L. W. Butler, encountered a Hun Post on their side of the Railway and had a brush with it. Two nights later an Enemy Patrol came into our country and, hiding in a ruined cottage in front of No. 2 Post, surprised our Patrol on its return journey. In the fight that followed, Second Lieutenant Brookes was wounded and Sergeant Murnane killed. It was understood that we were to tackle the job of clearing the hedgerows on the 28th, and preparations were made for that as well. We afterwards learned, from the prisoners captured on the 27th, that the Garrison numbered about 200, and that, curiously enough, the middle of the Village formed the boundary of two sectors; a Company from one sector holding the Sugar Refinery, and another Company from an adjoining Sector

Digitized by Google

occupying the buildings at the Northern end. The latter sector included the hedgerows, which were garrisoned by still another Company; the hedgerows formed the front Line in that part of his frontage. So the Germans could not be said to hold the line lightly.

Since Lieutenant Melles' exploit of the 21st June, the enemy had been busily wiring the land between the Railway and the Village. This our patrols and the aerial photographs told us. It was left to Ruahine Company to discover on the night of the 21st July what wiring he had been doing in the hedgerows. We knew there was a machine-gun post behind the hedge, in a corner of the field opposite No. 3 Post, and at midnight a detachment of the first Light Trench Mortar Battery, under Lieutenant Nicol, fired sixty Stokes Bombs into the position, and at ten minutes past twelve the 15th Howitzer Battery N.Z.F.A. placed three salvos at a point about 200 yards behind. The machine-gun was evidently hit by the Stokes, because it was not brought into action by the enemy. The Stokes Gun is able to fire so rapidly that eight bombs are in the air together, and the effect of sixty bombs exploding in a very short space of time can be imagined. Directly Lieu-

Digitized by Google

tenant Nicol ceased fire, Lieutenant Robbie led forward his fourteen men and struck the hedge about 150 yards from the corner. They found it heavily wired, and exchanged bombs with some Germans on the other side; apparently with some effect, for groans were heard. Here, unhappily, Lieutenant Robbie was mortally wounded by a bullet from a rifle fired through the hedge. Lance-Corporal N. G. Harding, the senior N.C.O. present, led the party along the hedge in a North-Westerly direction towards the corner where the machine-gun was. He could hear an officer or N.C.O. endeavouring to rally the garrison on the other side, but a few more bombs being thrown at them, they made off. Wire was met with all along the hedge. The object of the party had been attained, and Harding, sending a man back to No. 3 Post for a stretcher, withdrew, carrying Lieutenant Robbie with him. The latter, however, died before they reached the post. We buried this gallant officer next day at the Military Cemetery at Prowse Point, 3,000 yards South of Messines, on the Northern edge of Ploegsteert Wood. From No. 3 Post the groans of the wounded and dying Germans were heard until 2 a.m.

The necessity of destroying the wire before the Village and in the hedgerows was plain,

Digitized by Google

and the 15th Battery and the Heavies came to our aid. The former did some very accurate shooting, with careful observation, on the Village side, and the Assaulting Company met with no difficulty there from wire. It was, however, a more troublesome matter to destroy the wire in the hedges by shell-fire, and no great success was attained. The big 6 inch and 9.2 inch guns are two-edged weapons, if such monster engines can be so described. Our troops had to be withdrawn from any posts within 300 yards of their target, for apart from any difficulty the Heavy Gunners met with in hitting the object, the spread of the shell is very wide, especially with the 106 fuse, which increases it immensely.

We thought it necessary, as part of the preparation for the attack, to occupy the Railway Line before the Village, and also to establish a new Post on the Eastern corner of the field in which No. 3 Post was situated. The latter was not done until the second attack on the 31st July, but we placed three more groups of sentries on the Railway. If the Hun had forestalled us there, perhaps his posts would have escaped our Artillery Barrage, and might have caused a check to the advance before the men had got into their stride.

Digitized by Google

For assembly trenches we dug a new Sap along the Messines–La Basse Ville Road, which we had named Cabaret Road, and opened up an old trench (Unnamed Sap) that ran from No. 1 Post to the Railway. We dare not take either of these two trenches as far as the Railway for fear of raising suspicions of a projected attack, and so dug them only half way. Unchained Avenue was a German Communication Trench leading from the Au Chasseur Cabaret to the Railway and passing to the North of No. 1 Post, and this we opened right up to the Line. No. 1 Post was enlarged to hold another Platoon, and a Communication Trench, which we called La Truie Sap, was dug to provide a shorter route from the Power Buzzer Dug-out to No. 1 Post and to the Village, via Cabaret Road or Unchained Avenue. All these saps would serve the further purpose of communication with the Village after its capture, and, indeed, the telephone wire to the place where Company Headquarters was to be situated during the action, was laid down Unchained Avenue two nights before.

Dumps also had to be made. Stokes Bombs were needed in front of No. 2 Post to feed the guns that were to bombard the Estaminet, a two-story detached building

Digitized by Google

at the Northern end of the Village. We suspected the existence of a machine-gun in the second story of the Estaminet, and our suspicions proved correct. A larger general dump was made in the La Truie Farm buildings on the Cabaret Road, containing S.A.A., rations, water, flares, etc., for the use of the future garrison of the Village.

Our preparations were all completed by the night of the 25th, when Hawke's Bay Company came up from Kortepyp and relieved Taranaki Company on the Right of the Front Line, including No. 1 Post. The whole Company thus had twenty-four hours in which to view the approaches to the Village and to study, through the glasses, the portion of it allotted to them in the attack. Unfortunately the Hun put down one of his favourite Artillery Barrages on the Right of the Line next morning, and the Company lost four killed and eleven wounded.

At 1.30 a.m. on the morning of the 27th, Hawke's Bay Company (3 officers and 136 other ranks) was in position waiting for zero hour. Lieutenant Hanna, with No. 7 Platoon, was on the Right in Cabaret Road ready to seize the Sugar Refinery. Sergeant Devery, with No. 8 Platoon, in the Centre in Unnamed

Digitized by Google

Sap to attack the heart of the Village, and Lieutenant Gibbs, with No. 6 Platoon, on the Left, lay in Unchained Avenue, his objective being the Tissage. Captain McLean held No. 5 Platoon in reserve, and made his Headquarters in a trench parallel to the Railway running from Unchained Avenue to the Cabaret Road. At 2 a.m. our barrage came down like a thunderclap, and under its cover the three Platoons stormed the Village. Lieutenant Hanna had but little difficulty in taking the Sugar Refinery, probably owing to the fact that its garrison, so we learned from a prisoner, was concentrated in a large cellar underneath the building. Sergeant Devery cleared the centre part of the hamlet, and met with considerable opposition, that was overcome with severe loss to the enemy, thirty bodies being counted in the street alone, apart from any killed in the buildings. To capture the Tissage, Lieutenant Gibbs had to fight hard, but nothing could stop the men, and they swept the place clear of its defenders, of whom a number were killed by our Lewis Guns, as they fled towards Warneton. Cellars and dug-outs were bombed. Ten bodies lay near the Tissage alone. Four posts of a section each (forty-four other ranks under Lieutenant Hanna) were left behind, two on the banks of the

Digitized by Google

Lys and two facing towards Warneton, and the remainder of the Company withdrew from the Village as ordered.

So far the affair was a wonderful success, and our losses were insignificant. But, in a very short time, the position was reversed. Fifty minutes after zero the German gunners put down a Box Barrage along the Railway that completely cut off the Village from the rest of the Company, and drove Captain McLean and his reserves out of the position they had taken up. Two small counter-attacks were then made from Warneton, which were beaten off by the two Northern posts, to be followed, however, by one in the strength of about 250 rifles from the same direction. No appeal for Artillery help came from the posts by means of the Véry Pistols that they carried, and the Germans, by sheer weight of numbers, overwhelmed them. They attacked and drove back to the Railway the Left of the two Northern posts, and then concentrated on Sergeant Devery's posts, one on the Right of the Northern end, and the other on the River Bank. Some of the attackers climbed on to the roofs of the houses in the High Street and kept up a galling fire on our men, who retaliated as best they could, but the latter's chief efforts were directed to stem-

Digitized by Google

ming the main tide of attack. These two posts fought to the bitter end, one man, besides Devery, surviving. Lieutenant Hanna made an effort to assist Devery on the Railway side of the Main Street, and only when he saw the posts had gone and the numbers were against him did he withdraw across the Line to face a further advance of No. 1 Post, if such were attempted. Communications went a short time after the Hun barrage came down, and the first news of the events in the Village was brought to Captain McLean by one of Devery's wounded. McLean promptly led two Platoons forward, and a Platoon of Ruahine Company followed him, but by the time he reached the Railway the enemy was in full occupation, and he wisely decided to accept the position and withdraw. Time was given to the enemy to remove his, and also we hoped our, wounded, and the Heavies were then turned on to the ill-fated Village. Our losses were four killed, fourteen missing and thirty-one wounded, and, under the circumstances, can only be regarded as extraordinarily light.

Had it been a raid our success would have been complete, but as it was our intention to hold the Village one must endeavour to arrive at the causes of the failure. My

Digitized by Google

opinion is that the causes were principally three: the first and chief one that the posts left behind to garrison the Village did not put up the S.O.S. signal; the second that all four posts should have been concentrated at the Warneton end of the Village, for it was really only from there that a counter-attack could come, and thirdly that a reserve should have been retained in the Sugar Refinery, where it would not have been so easily separated from the defenders of the Village. However, it is easy to be wise after the event.

At 7 a.m., as I tied my papers together and made down the Communication Trench (Ultimo Avenue) to Battalion Headquarters, I might have been taking up my brief after an exciting case and walking back from the Court-house to my office. And yet what a difference! Half-way down the trench I passed the stretcher-bearers carrying some severely wounded men. They were too weak to talk, poor fellows, but their pinched faces showed what they were suffering. Happily, the ground was dry, and they were spared the slipping and sliding over a muddy track. It is the wounded that should have our sympathy. The dead are gone, and the living are thankful to be still alive. On both attacks on La Basse Ville,

Digitized by Google

the medical arrangements were excellent, and the wounded did not have to wait long before they were removed on stretchers to the tramway that carried them to the Dressing Station behind Hill 63. How the missing fared we should not hear for some weeks. We could only hope the number would include some that were wounded only.

Ruahine Company relieved Hawke's Bay Company in the afternoon, and it withdrew to Kortepyp Camp to bind up its wounds. Next night the rest of the Battalion moved back, its place being taken by the 1st Battalion. While the relief was proceeding, the S.O.S. went up from our front and from the 1st Battalion, Auckland Regiment, on our left: our guns started in, I was going to say, "Hell for leather," for at times they sounded behind us like galloping race-horses. The wire went between Battalion Headquarters and Ruahine Company in the Front Line, and until communication was restored one spent an anxious time, as the system of small posts is a standing invitation to a determined enemy to mop one or two of them up in a raid. However, on this occasion he attacked with little determination, and the posts drove him off. One dazed-looking German wandered into

Digitized by Google

the hands of the Aucklanders, and there the matter ended.

I was only given time for a few hours' sleep, a bath and breakfast, before a summons to Brigade Headquarters reached me, and at a conference there, General Melville informed us that as part of a big advance in the Ypres Salient, the Brigade would make another attempt to take and hold La Basse Ville, to capture the hedgerow system as far as the Railway, and, on the left of that, to raid the enemy posts and also advance our line. On the left of the Brigade, the Australians were to carry out some similar operation. First Battalion Auckland would make the raid, 2nd Battalion Auckland establish the new line of posts, and we were to seize the Village and Hedgerows. We should be the extreme right Battalion of the " big push."

The 31st July was the day appointed, and to-day was the 29th. Twenty-four hours clear were ours for preparation. I gave Wellington West Coast Company (Captain McKinnon, M.C.), with two Platoons from Taranaki Company, the job of seizing the Village, and Ruahine Company (Captain Urquhart) (less one Platoon) the Hedgerows, and, at the Brigadier's suggestion, nine volunteers from Hawke's Bay Company,

Digitized by Google

who were through the first attack, were attached to Captain McKinnon to act as guides. There was a good deal to be done and arranged. Unfortunately, our Artillery Barrage just missed the Hedgerows, and with nothing else being done, the German garrison, with their machine guns, would face undisturbed our advance in that quarter. Lieutenant Nicol, however, came to the rescue with his Stokes Mortars. He provided four guns, and we established a dump of 200 shells for him. A Vickers Gun from the 1st Machine Gun Company, and three Lewis Guns from 1st Wellington, would fire into the Germans until the 200 shells had been exhausted. Thereupon, Captain Urquhart's men would advance. Nicol, according to the plan, would then take up his guns and make for La Basse Ville, picking up a party of men waiting for him at La Truie Farm with more bombs, and help in the defence of the Village against counter-attacks. Captain Urquhart sent up his remaining Platoon on the night of the 30th to dig a post in which he could make his Headquarters and keep his Reserve Platoon near the Eastern corner of the field. As can be imagined, this facilitated his task immensely. When his two assaulting Platoons left their Assembly Points, he

Digitized by Google

simply moved forward with his reserve Platoon to a trench dug beforehand, and attached his telephone to a wire already laid. The communications with the Village constituted a difficult problem. The enemy's Box Barrage had repeatedly destroyed the wire on the 27th, and the signallers now reconnoitred a route by way of some disused trenches South of the Sugar Refinery, but that was abandoned and a more direct route taken. Lamps, pigeons, telephone and runners were all to be used. In the action the lamps were a failure, owing to the smoke from the exploding shells shrouding the light, and the wires, although repaired several times, did not hold. The runner, as often has been the case, was the surest messenger. The pigeons, I think, should have been employed. We used them in the 3rd Battalion at Passchendaele in October with success. The dump at the Truie Farm had been set on fire by the enemy gunners on the 27th, and burned merrily for hours after, so that had to be refilled.

The afternoon of the 30th gave the two Company Commanders time to have a conference with their section leaders and men, and with myself to meet the Brigadier to discuss final details. Zero hour was 3.50

Digitized by Google

a.m., and the 8 officers and 328 other ranks, apart from Headquarters and medical personnel, marched out of Kortepyp Camp at 11.15 p.m. This allowed three hours for the march, one hour to collect the impedimenta of war at Prowse Point and for unforeseen delays, and half an hour for rest in the assembly positions before zero. Lieutenant Pollock had gone ahead to have the bombs and flares ready for the Companies as they passed through. The cooks went with him, and took up their quarters at Prowse Point. Headquarters moved up earlier, and we had established ourselves in the Power Buzzer Dug-out by 10.55 p.m. As we walked up through Ploegsteert Wood and along the slippery duck-walks of St. Ives Avenue and Ultimo Avenue, for it had commenced to rain early in the day, I was glad we had given them ample time to reach their assembly points without anxiety and hurry, and as Treadwell and I sat waiting in the dug-out, we heard the Platoons of the Wellington West Coast and Taranaki Companies moving past to La Truie Sap and Cabaret Road. All were in position by 3 a.m. Captains McKinnon and Urquhart came in to report everything ready, and shortly after they themselves called their runners and left the dug-out.

Digitized by Google

The operation was a distinct success, although won at the cost of hard fighting. The casualties out of the 8 officers and 328 other ranks were officers 1 killed and 4 wounded, and other ranks 36 killed and 93 wounded. As usual, many of the casualties were incurred from Artillery fire after the objectives were gained.

The Ruahine Company had a difficult task. However, Captain Urquhart's scheme of attack was sound, and he displayed great acumen in meeting alterations of plan necessitated by the changing conditions as the battle in his quarter swayed to and fro, and further he was assisted by Wellington West Coast Company on his flank at a critical moment. Lieutenant H. R. Biss, with No. 15 Platoon, was to clear the Railway between the top end of the Village and the point marked 5 K and establish posts. His leading section under Corporal Bargh, while advancing towards the line, met with heavy fire from a machine gun planted in the fence along the Railway, and, suffering severe casualties, was hung up in shell-holes. Lieutenant Biss himself went forward, leaving his Sergeant, W. Borlase, to bring on the remainder of the Platoon, and got into touch with Corporal Bargh. It is a costly operation charging a machine gun

Digitized by Google

across the open, and no doubt Lieutenant Biss would have been obliged to stalk it, had not a few men from Wellington West Coast Company, including, I believe, Corporal Andrew, worked along the Railway. Seeing them, the Germans wavered, and Lieutenant Biss, with all his Platoon, for Sergeant Borlase had come up, rushed the position and captured two guns. Biss was wounded, but carried on until the post was on the way to consolidation, and then went back to the Dressing Station, first reporting to Captain Urquhart and to Battalion Headquarters. In the meantime, on his left, Lance-Corporal S. C. Foot led a party from No. 13 Platoon (2nd Lieutenant C. S. Brown) along the hedge that runs to 5 K, and, in spite of continuous machine-gun fire from the Railway and from his left flank, established a post near its top end. Thus, along the Railway we had gained success.

On the other hand, Lieutenant Brown's centre party was almost wiped out in a frontal attack against the hedge where poor Robbie met his death on the 21st July, Brown himself being wounded. His left party made excellent progress, almost reaching the road by an advance along the Northern Hedge, but they too were reduced

Digitized by Google

to three from the rifle and machine-gun fire of the Huns lurking behind their wire. However, the enemy's flank had been turned from the Railway, and soon Sergeant Foot noticed they were beginning to trickle back towards Warneton. He immediately sent the best shot he had (Private Stumbles) right round to their Northern flank, and both he and Stumbles kept up a rapid fire. Several Germans dropped, and the remainder, totalling twenty-four, held up their hands. Four of them were sent to carry out a wounded Auckland officer, and the remainder escorted to Battalion Headquarters. Before they departed, Sergeant Foot extracted the information that they were part of a Prussian Company garrisoning the Hedgerows, with Company Headquarters at a concrete dug-out near 5 K. They had only taken over the line an hour or two before our attack commenced. Foot then pushed on to 5 K and established a post there in a commanding position. In the concrete dug-out he found the Prussian Company Commander's batman, a mere boy, who volunteered the information that that officer had hastily retreated directly our barrage opened.

Meanwhile, Captain McKinnon's men had taken the Village with a rush, half an hour's

Digitized by Google

work with bomb, rifle and bayonet being sufficient to clear it. This time, the more difficult fighting was encountered in the shell-holes between the Railway and the top end of the Village, in the buildings there, and in the hedges and ditches nearer the river. Many Germans were killed in these defences, and those that broke and fled were shot as they ran along the river bank or in the open towards Warneton.

Among the decorations bestowed on the Battalion for the 31st July was the V.C. given to Corporal J. Andrew, of the Wellington West Coast Company. He led a section to capture the machine gun in the Estaminet, and, afterwards, with some more men he attached to himself to replace the casualties he had incurred, went as far as the outskirts of Warneton by way of the Railway and captured another gun there. It was his party that assisted Lieutenant Biss to rush the machine-gun post on the Railway.

The Brigadier relieved the Battalion on the night of the 31st, and until then it faced the Hun Artillery and his counter-attacks on the Village. Our own artillery and machine-gun protective barrage was most effective, and the few Germans that escaped it fell to our rifles and Lewis guns. Captain McKinnon, after capturing the Village,

Digitized by Google

placed three platoons along its Northern edge, one platoon between the centre of the Village and the river, and the remaining two on the west of the main street. Lieutenant Nicol, with his indefatigable trench-mortar men and two guns, were also on that side. McKinnon made his own headquarters near the Sugar Refinery. Comparatively, Urquhart lost more men in taking his objective—less in holding it: McKinnon less in his attack—more in hanging on.

La Basse Ville, during the day, was subjected to an exceptionally severe bombardment: from outside it looked as if not one of its defenders could live through it. All McKinnon's officers were killed or wounded, and that brave fellow Nicol promptly volunteered to hand over his guns to his sergeant and take charge of the front line. McKinnon very gladly accepted the offer, and it was only a short time after Nicol assumed command that one of the German counter-attacks developed. A party, estimated at about fifty, collected under cover of the river bank, and made towards our right flank. Nicol at the moment was near the centre of the line, and, taking a few men with him, hurried down to the spot. His party grew to ten as he went, and with a shout they fell on the Boche with the bayonet. A

Digitized by Google

report made by Nicol at the time gave the number bayoneted as twenty, and most of the remainder were wiped out by our fire as they made off. Two other counter-attacks that he launched died under our barrage, put down in response to the S.O.S. call.

It was steadily raining now, and probably troops have never handed over their responsibilities more cheerfully than we did that night. Pollock had provided a piping hot meal for the men at Prowse Point, which they had on their way out, and warm blankets and a comfortable camp awaited them at Kortepyp. Happily again, Captain Goldstein was able to evacuate all the wounded before he withdrew from his improvised dressing station not far from Au Chasseur Cabaret.

For their share in the action Captain McKinnon was given a bar to his M.C., and Captains Urquhart and Goldstein and Lieutenant Nicol the M.C., and I have been told that my D.S.O. and Mention in Dispatches were connected with it. But we were all delighted because so many non-commissioned officers and privates received decorations. One must not belittle the organization and direction emanating from senior officers, but one's sincerest admiration goes to the man who does the actual

Digitized by Google

fighting. He, after all, is the foundation of the whole show. Unless the non-commissioned officers and men are made of the right stuff and have the courage and resolution of giants, all the planning in the world will not win a battle. Unfortunately, often the best deeds have no historian, and their heroes go unwritten. La Basse Ville was unique because it afforded so many opportunities for acts of individual daring and leadership, and because such acts were recorded and thus could be recognized. The decorations given were liberal in number, but every one was earned ten times over.

The next day General Russell called the two company commanders and myself to General Melville's Headquarters, and personally congratulated them on their work, which, if I may say so too, was undoubtedly of the highest order. At the same time the General informed me that he had recommended me for the command of the 3rd Battalion of the Regiment, which had become vacant early in June, upon Lieutenant-Colonel Fletcher being severely wounded. This unexpected promotion again brought regret and pleasure with it, for in four months one had become very attached to the 2nd Battalion. I had met

Digitized by Google

with much kindness and support from all ranks from the Commanding Officer downwards. A few days later General Godley also had the battalion paraded and added his congratulations. I was very sorry I was not present, but in the meantime Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham had returned, and I went on leave to England. And, to my mind, fourteen days' leave was worth much honour and glory.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

PASSCHENDAELE

ON my return from leave I reported to Brigadier-General Hart, D.S.O., at the 4th Brigade Headquarters, and the same day took over the 3rd Battalion, which was then holding the Frelinghem sector.

Lieutenant-Colonel Cunningham very kindly consented to exchange my mare for Lieutenant-Colonel Fletcher's horse, and she and her groom Andrews came across. While I was away Andrews and my batman Lange had met with the experience of being bombed by aeroplanes. The transport of the 1st Machine Gun Company and the 2nd Battalion were together near Kortepyp, and the bombs landed in their midst. The spread of the exploding bomb is very low, and the animals that were killed, and they were many, mostly had their legs cut off. Andrews said, after the noise of the explosion, he heard only a long-drawn-out groan from the unfortunate animals, and then

Digitized by Google

the rattle of picket chains and dull thuds as they fell. Among the losses were the two famous chestnut draught horses belonging to the 2nd Battalion.

I was only in the sector six days before we were relieved, and, after a few days in deserted Pont de Nieppe, moved with the whole Brigade to the training area between St. Omer and Boulogne. While I was in the trenches a very daring piece of work was done by Sergeant Pennefather, of Hawke's Bay Company. In daylight he swam the Lys, which divided us from the enemy, and, discovering a raft on their side of the river, made a ferry with it and with some telephone wire, also the property of the Hun. While there he reconnoitred the position of a night listening post, and after dark ferried three men and himself across and attacked the post. He himself was wounded, but three Germans were killed. Pennefather thoroughly deserved the Distinguished Conduct Medal which he received for his gallantry.

The 4th Brigade was not really a part of the New Zealand Division, but in September changed places with the 3rd N.Z.R.B., and came under General Russell's jurisdiction. The latter Brigade went North to dig for the French Army there.

Digitized by Google

In billets the Battalion was in clover. Headquarters were in the Village, and the companies scattered about in farm-houses around, except Wellington West Coast Company, who were in tents. The Area Officer, a Major in the Regular Army, did everything he could for our comfort, and we were very much indebted to him. The Château was a delightful change after the Flemish farm-yards. Its garden and lawns, though neglected, possessed some borders gay with scarlet begonias, and the band (converted gardeners temporarily) soon remedied all neglect. With the lawn cut, its edges trimmed, and the paths weeded and raked, the place looked charming.

The month there was one full of benefit. In the five months since its formation the Battalion had not had a great many casualties, and the smartness born of two months' barrack-square training in England was still to be seen. But it had had over three months in the trenches, and was eager to stretch its limbs on the wide training grounds. It is a heavy strain upon a military unit to lose officers, non-commissioned officers and men in fairly large numbers, and then, after a short interval spent in the trenches, to lose more. Each time reinforcements replace the casualties,

Digitized by Google

but if the process is repeated several times, the whole loses its cohesion; it becomes a team with no combination. Doubtless at the end of the summer most regiments are in this condition unless they have been fortunate enough to get long spells behind the lines in between their engagements. The 3rd Battalion, however, was "in the pink." Many of its officers and non-commissioned officers were veteran soldiers, who had either been posted to its ranks direct from France, or been serving in England as instructors at our base camps, and a large proportion of the men were recruited from the convalescent camps. Their two months in England had consolidated them all, and the three months in the trenches gave the inexperienced ones a knowledge of war. They were now ready for a big advance.

We had everything we wanted at Henneveux: extensive fields for Company training, a miniature rifle range, field firing ground and Brigade manœuvre area. With such opportunities for practising the attack, it would have been anything but a credit had the Battalion not known its intricacies. As part of our lessons the Companies and the Battalion, and eventually the Brigade, waged mimic battles with fierce intensity.

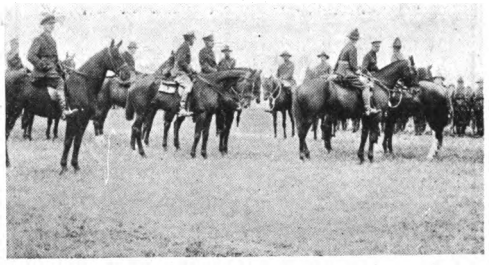
Digitized by Google

The inspection of the Division by Sir Douglas Haig was a brilliant affair. This time the parade ground was not a muddy *pavé* road, but a wide expanse of meadow, and practically every unit was there. The Commander-in-Chief, who was accompanied by the Right Hon. Winston Churchill, M.P., rode down the ranks of the Division drawn up in line, and the Battalions and Companies of the other Services then turned to the right and marched past in Column of Platoons. Sir Douglas Haig shook hands with all Battalion Commanders as he passed down. He was kind enough to say to me that he was proud to include the Division in his Command, and that it had always done more than it was asked to do, and from a soldier that was high praise.

The Battalion had a long march from its billets to the Parade Ground, and by the time it arrived home again it had been going twelve hours. On the way back, the Y.M.C.A. Officer set up his movable canteen on the road, and every man was given a cup of hot cocoa and some biscuits. This institution has played a great part in the lives of our soldiers in France. It has followed them into the trenches and its officers have shared all the dangers and hardships of the war. In all kinds of weather, by night

Digitized by Google

Lieut.-General Sir Alex. Godley receiving prize at New Zealand Division Horse Show.



Inspection of New Zealand Division by Sir D. Haig. Passing 3rd Battalion Wellington Regiment.

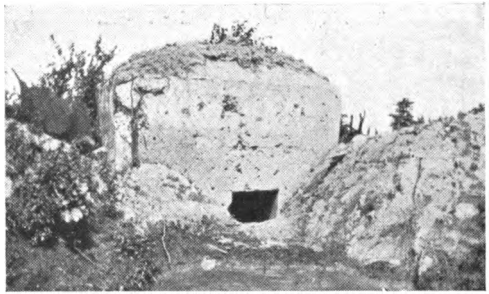
Looking north-east from Waterloo Farm, October 5th, 1917

Waterloo Farm, October 5th, 1917.

[*To face p.* 216.

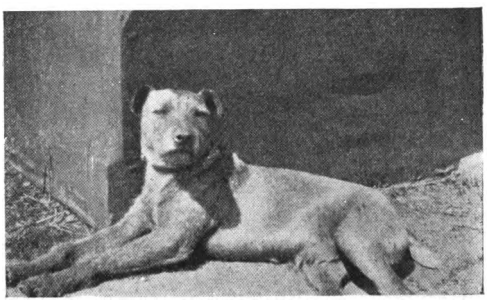
Digitized by Google

Ruins of cathedral, Ypres.



German pill-box near St. Loos.

Battalion Headquarters, Hill 63, just above Red Lodge.



"Paddy," Battalion mascot 1st Wellington.

Digitized by Google

and by day, always when asked, and very often on their own initiative, these voluntary workers have given our men refreshment at moments when they were most in need of it.

Opportunity was taken of the 1st, 2nd and 4th Brigades being together to have a joint Church Parade of the three Battalions of the Regiment. It was an historic occasion, and General Russell paid the Regiment the compliment of being present. Afterwards, the officers lunched together at the Headquarters of the 1st Battalion, and in the afternoon a football match was played between the 1st and 2nd Battalions, the former winning by 15 points to 3.

Before we left Henneveux, Lieutenant-Colonel Cook, D.S.O., gave the officers and non-commissioned officers of the 3rd Battalion a very interesting account of the part the 1st Battalion played at the Battle of Messines, and his description of the doings of his Companies must have stirred the imaginations of the leaders of their kindred Companies in the 3rd Battalion.

The main road to Boulogne lay not far from Henneveux, and leave to that seaport town was given during part of our time in rest. The men used the Army motor lorries on such occasions as their con-

Digitized by Google

veyances. They are, in fact, the soldier's omnibus, and if you told a soldier that he had to find his way from Havre to Dunkirk by road, I doubt whether he would walk very much of the distance. The British Government has many thousands of this type of vehicle in France, and I see it is a problem for the Demobilization Committee to put them on the market after the war without causing a glut.

Our holiday was terminated rather unceremoniously, and we struck camp and departed on a few hours' notice. That was on the 25th September, and until the early morning of the 4th October the weather was glorious—sunny days and bright, moonlight nights. The first day we marched twelve miles to the Hamlet of Seninghem, the second day nine miles to Arques, a manufacturing place outside St. Omer, and the last day eighteen miles to the Eecke Area. The older men or those with any physical defect can carry on with most of their duties, but long marches with " full pack up " find them out: they cannot do them. As long as a Battalion is liable to be ordered to move any great distance by road, such men are a source of danger, because if they fall out others follow their example, and a Battalion Commander, in self protection,

Digitized by Google

must have them evacuated as unfit. And yet it is seldom long marches have to be faced, and otherwise these older men are often useful soldiers and supply stability and backbone to a section. There were more of this class in the 3rd Battalion than in the 1st and 2nd, I suppose because the Base Camps were cleared of everybody to fill the ranks of the new Brigade.

At Eecke we stayed two days. There we parted company with those who were detailed for the Reinforcement Camp, and so would not see the fight. The rest gave Headquarters and the Company Commanders an opportunity to do much of the administrative work necessary before going into action, and of which there is a considerable amount. The preparation of the rolls is an important part of it: from them the casualty lists are prepared and checked. It is difficult to keep the casualty returns up to date in the middle of a battle, but difficulties increase the longer they are neglected. A man may be blown absolutely to pieces and not a trace of him ever seen again, but another in his section noticed him a few moments before sitting in the trench where the shell burst. This man himself may be killed within the next few hours, and his evidence be no longer available

Digitized by Google

The return of " missing " men is a vague one, and we made every effort to reduce their numbers. The Companies were mustered after an engagement, and any information obtained that would assist was recorded. The cabled advice to a soldier's next of kin that he is " missing " carries with it a load of fear, hope and despair, that must be borne for weeks to come. The only real chances are that he may be a prisoner of war, or turn up in Hospital, having been wounded and evacuated without his section leaders knowing of it. If it is the latter case his name is eventually sent back to the Battalion by our records office, who are informed of all soldiers admitted to the Hospitals. In the former case word reaches us through Switzerland in a few weeks. Lately it has been suggested that the Germans are not reporting prisoners at once, but using them in shelled areas, and if any are killed nothing more is said. In the mind of a mother or wife these two cases do not exhaust the alternatives; hope never dies. There have been rare instances of missing men appearing months after, and uncertainty continues to tear them both ways.

From Eecke we motored up to the Trenches in lorries, and reconnoitred our battle ground

Digitized by Google

by daylight. There was very little shelling from the enemy guns and we obtained a clear view of our Battalion objectives. By this time the whole scheme of attack had been elaborated, and the Company Commanders knew what part their men were to play in it. Fortunately, in that expanse of undulating country without many distinctive features on its surface, our Battalion area contained a road and some trees and a remarkable Pill Box that acted as marks for Company boundaries, and on our reconnaissance the Company Commanders impressed them on their minds and afterwards explained them to their men.

The objectives were strictly limited: the Brigade and probably the three attacking Corps were to advance 1,700 yards and there entrench themselves. Everything would be done in the conventional way. We should assemble overnight, and at zero hour, which no doubt would be a little before daylight, our guns would open and we should move on behind their Barrage. When we had reached a certain point the Barrage would halt and we also. The men would dig in there, and be relieved in the course of forty-eight hours or more. The last advance had been made a few days before, so the enemy expected another at any mo-

Digitized by Google

ment, at some point on a ten-mile front. His Artillery inactivity was curious, but probably his guns had been registered one by one, on ground over which we must advance, and then covered up again. Our preponderance in guns seemed enormous. It is too early to adjudge upon the merits and demerits of the Theory of the Limited Objective as compared with Ludendorff's Tactics, but it is clear the former in no way resembles a War of Movement.

The 1st and 4th Brigades of the Division were to attack side by side, the latter being on the right. On its right was the 3rd Australian Division, and on the left of the 1st Brigade an English Division. The 4th Brigade frontage was approximately 800 yards, and included the village of Gravenstafel and the Abraham Heights, which formed a spur of the famous Passchendaele Ridge. The system of " leap-frogging " was to be adopted, and when 3rd Auckland and 3rd Otago had occupied the first objective—the Red Line—3rd Canterbury and 3rd Wellington would pass through them on to the second objective—the Blue Line. The objectives themselves were marked by no particular features : the trenches and pill boxes and ruined farmhouses between us and the Red and Blue Lines were the real

Digitized by Google

objectives. Third Wellington was behind 3rd Otago, and the latter's area embraced Wimbledon dug-outs and Van Meulen Farm, while ours included Gravenstafel Village, Berlin Pill Boxes and Waterloo Farm. I anticipated stouter resistance from the enemy the nearer we came to the Blue Line, and therefore decided to give Ruahine Company (Lieutenant A. J. Williams) the task of capturing Gravenstafel Village, and to divide up the remainder of the area between Wellington West Coast Company (Captain B. H. Morison) and Taranaki Company (Major A. E. M. Jones), keeping Hawke's Bay Company (Captain F. S. Varnham) in reserve.

We completed our reconnaissance and returned to the motor lorry, which was waiting for us at the bottom of the road. In the meantime the Battalion had moved up from the Eecke area to Clyde Camp, west of Poperinghe. We had taken longer than we thought we should, and as we were late for our own mess dined at the officers' club in Poperinghe. The Hun aeroplanes were busy and while we were having dinner dropped several bombs in the town. One fell in the next street, and a messenger succeeded in getting a doctor from amongst the officers at the table to attend to the wounded. The aerial bombs are fitted with

Digitized by Google

an instantaneous fuse, and explode immediately they touch the ground, with a wide, low spread of the fragments. A man sleeping on a low stretcher would be hit, whereas if he had been on the floor he might have escaped.

Clyde Camp consisted of tents and a large barn, and Headquarters mess was a table in the open field. We spent a day there, and had all our meals outside, even dinner in the moonlight. Throughout the two nights we spent there the aeroplanes dropped bombs. The horrible moment was when one instinctively felt the machines were directly overhead. The second evening, as we sat smoking after dinner, one of the enemy airmen was discovered by our searchlights, which pointed him out white and distinct to the anti-aircraft guns, who hammered at him. Several times we thought he was down, but he managed to escape. Third Canterbury was the unlucky Battalion of the Brigade: bombs fell among its transport, killing many of its most valuable animals.

On the 1st October the Battalion discarded everything but fighting kit and marched to a bivouac behind Goldfish Château. This once handsome brick building, about two miles from Ypres, now presented rather a dejected appearance, shells

Digitized by Google

at various times having knocked spots out of it. The bivouac was a bare paddock, but the men dug holes in the ground in which to sleep, so that an aeroplane bomb could only injure them by a direct hit. I walked round the lines after they had all turned in. They had had a tiring march. The road was crowded with all kinds of traffic, coming and going, the delays had been tedious and the dust awful. With their waterproof sheets they had made tent-like protections against the dew of the clear, moonlight night, but their cardigan jackets and the warmth of each other's bodies were their only means of fighting the cold. However, they slept soundly. In less than forty-eight hours many of them would be sleeping the soundest sleep of all.

We had parted with the transport that afternoon, as they had taken up their quarters with the other transport of the Brigade two or three miles further back, at Brandhoek Area. The Quartermaster and his staff and the Band remained there also, and formed a Miniature Base for the Battalion. In days gone by the Bandsmen were employed as stretcher-bearers, but it was too difficult to replace losses amongst them, and other duties were given to them. Lieutenant Coltman, the Quartermaster, and

Digitized by Google

Lieutenant Stables, the Transport Officer, were good administrators, and there was no anxiety as to supplies reaching the men at the front. Poor Stables was killed a few days after the commencement of our advance. While taking the rations up he was delayed on the narrow road by a block in front of him. The country on each side was a swamp, and while he waited a shell got him.

Next morning I bicycled up to Wieltje Dug-out, with Lieutenant-Colonel Rowe, of 3rd Canterbury, to a conference of Battalion Commanders with General Russell and the Brigadier. This conference was held in one of the familiar box rooms of these underground dug-outs. Details of the advance were carefully considered, and points made by the Divisional Commander. Brigade Headquarters later in the day established themselves in a German Pill Box called Pommern Redoubt, nearly a mile further up, and 3rd Otago and 3rd Auckland took over the present front line from the 2nd Brigade. Third Canterbury and ourselves (less eight Platoons) moved from the bivouacs below Ypres into the old British Front Line before the 31st July. Across the St. Jean Road, which ran along our left boundary, was 2nd Wellington, and I had

Digitized by Google

dinner in their Headquarters mess. As usual they were keen for a fight. We should not be alongside them. First Wellington took the Red Line and 2nd Auckland the Blue Line immediately on our left; 2nd Wellington were on their left again. I had lunch with Lieutenant-Colonel Blair, in his little cave off the trench, to which I succeeded when he moved out in the afternoon.

Between us and Abraham Heights lay a small ridge called Hill 37 (from its height in metres) and another valley, and it was from Hill 37 that we obtained our view of Gravenstafel and the Heights. A duck-walked track ran half way to the summit and our Engineers were working hard to carry it still further. This track was to be the road by which we should reach our Assembly Points. The Hun Artillery was practically silent, except for bursts on our Front Line, and his aeroplanes seemed to go further back with their missiles, so work was uninterrupted. The Pioneers also were making huge efforts to repair the St. Jean Road. There was no truce, however, for our guns of all calibres were practising Barrages, and doing destructive shoots day and night.

It was a weird scene of devastation; destruction on all sides, and the Mark of Cain seemed upon the land. Before one

Digitized by Google

reached our present Front Line one passed by German Pill Boxes, scattered here and there in haphazard fashion. Their capture had entailed many bitter struggles, still evidenced in some cases by the dead lying round. The country itself might have represented Dante's Inferno. Every square yard of it seemed foul with slaughter.

October 3rd was a busy day. The eight Platoons came up from Goldfish Château, and everyone received their load for the Battle—picks, shovels, S.O.S. grenade rockets, six sand-bags, etc. Don Quixote was not more heavily laden than a modern "digger." The officers were able to show their non-commissioned officers the objectives and to identify them on the maps. My own task was to find a suitable assembly ground for the Battalion, and this we discovered near the top of Hill 37. The duck-walks had been laid to the spot we chose, the Companies could bivouac in the order in which they would advance, and directly the guns opened up at zero hour they would go straight ahead. The Barrage Time Table included a wait of two hours after the Red Line was occupied, to allow for delays anticipated on other parts of the front, but it seemed wiser for us to follow hard on the heels of Otago at zero hour, rather than to

Digitized by Google

have to negotiate the Hun Barrage later on in daylight. By keeping close to them, we might possibly get inside his Barrage before it came down. This undulating country possesses no distinctive features visible at night, and elaborate precautions are necessary to keep the troops to their proper front. This very battle afforded a good instance of the danger. One Brigade followed the contour of the ground, and inclined to the left. A wide gap was left, but one of the Companies noticed it, and remedied the situation as well as possible until other arrangements were made. A road ran parallel along our front and the gaunt trunks of its avenue of trees would enable us to locate it in the dark before sunrise.

In the afternoon, after a Brigade conference, I went over the Assembly Ground with the Company Commanders, who left some men there to guide the Companies to their places later on. I had chosen a large shell-hole in the morning for Battalion Headquarters, and our Pioneers were making some sort of cover over it, so that we could write in it without being seen. That evening the Companies one by one left the old trench and moved up No. 5 Track, as it was called, to the Assembly Ground. The men ensconced themselves in shell-holes, and

Digitized by Google

improved and deepened them, and there the Battalion lay for the night. About midnight the weather broke, and a light rain fell. The enemy gunners seemed to waken up, for all night they shelled us intermittently, but although several men were "blown up," we had few casualties.

We snatched a few hours' sleep, and twenty minutes before zero emerged from our burrows to a wet, bleak morning, with a cold wind blowing from the Hun lines. It was pitch dark, but the men quickly mustered. A few minutes before zero the enemy guns spoke up, and we cursed our heavies who, we imagined, had roused their suspicions, but it was learned afterwards that the enemy was himself massing for attack, and when our Barrage commenced it did fearful execution amongst his troops in their Assembly Trenches. However, we had no time for speculation then, and on the Dogs of War being loosed we went ahead. The going was heavy, and consequently slow. The four Companies and Headquarters were in five columns abreast, each in single file, separated by about one hundred yards. We crossed the top of the hill, and dropped sharply down into the little valley in which our Front Line lay, and, turning my head, I could see in the semi-darkness

Digitized by Google

the Companies winding over the summit like snakes. Silhouetted against the skyline, they might have been long caravans creeping over the desert.

The noise from the guns was intense, and by now the enemy's Barrage had come down, and his shells were dropping round our Columns. We were in the valley, but not yet in direct touch with the Otagos, but we must not allow the two Battalions to be mixed up, and our own Barrage was close, as we could see from the bursting shells, so we had to go slowly. The enemy shells increased in number. It became necessary to use the compass to keep direction, and Headquarters marked time to enable me to take a bearing. We happened to be correct, but the Company on our right was boring across our front, and I sent my Adjutant, Lieutenant H. E. Crosse, to tell them to alter their direction. We halted to prevent cannoning into them, and the next thing I knew I was on my face on the ground, with an intense pain in the hip. A shell had burst close by, and it felt as if a large clod of hard earth had struck me. However, my signalling officer, Lieutenant Edwards, put his hand over the place, and at once said I was wounded. At this moment Crosse returned. It had been arranged before-

Digitized by Google

hand that if anything happened to me Captain Varnham should take over the Battalion, and Crosse asked me whether he should advise him. In the meantime the Column had passed and Crosse left me to rejoin it.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII

HOSPITAL

FROM the moment the doctor left me with my batman, who came to my assistance directly I fell, and hastened after the advancing Column, I ceased to be a combatant. I was no longer a soldier, but some other person; still an individual perhaps, and yet not quite. I became a patient, and a patient I have been for more months than I care to count. I still wear the King's uniform it is true, but as I have been branded P.U. (Permanently Unfit) it is only by courtesy, and in a few weeks I shall have it pressed and folded away. Will Time then set to work with his iron, to smooth out the furrow made on my brain by the war?

But I am wandering; I left myself lying in the shell-hole in the darkness preceding dawn, while Lange went over to a couple of stretcher-bearers a few yards away, who seemed to be making ready to carry out a man near them, to ask them to come back for me later. Lange returned with the

Digitized by Google

news that they were coming for me now, so evidently the man by them was beyond human aid. I was half carried and half got myself on to the stretcher, and the two bearers with Lange alongside made straight for the Ypres Road. Progress was slow on the slippery shell-bitten ground, and the enemy's barrage became thicker and thicker. Fortunately the mud rendered the effect of the shells local, and huge columns of dirt and water shot into the air with each explosion. They seemed to me more like large bombs than shells. Of course, at the time, every "moment of terror" seems the worst and the longest, but I do think that was the hottest corner I had ever been in, and I lay on the stretcher and thought that it would be nothing short of a miracle if we escaped.

And just then another one went off in a shell-hole full of water alongside the stretcher and hit the two bearers. Lange and I were unhurt, it seemed then. I craned my neck and saw the bearer at my head falling gently forward with the blood running down his forehead. His foot was entangled in the shoulder-strap, and I could not for the life of me get at it to loosen its grip. He fell on one knee, and while in that position seemed to recover himself, and with his field dressing bound up his head. Here Lange took charge

Digitized by Google

and suggested our only hope was for me to walk. The bearers said they would be all right, and I agreed with no hesitation. If it had only been suggested to me before I believe I could have done without the stretcher. I put my arm round Lange's neck, and with my stick struggled on. A few moments after a Taranaki Lance-Corporal caught up to us on his way out with two fingers shot away and very kindly turned himself into a crutch on the other side. The difficulty was to find ground wide enough for three abreast, but we hobbled out of the Barrage and then Lange and I managed to reach a regimental Aid Post that lay across our track. The Doctor's dressing had slipped down and, while the Medical Orderly was applying another, I discovered a hole through the back of my steel helmet, and the orderly found another wound in my head. It must have been a part of the shell that wounded the two bearers.

There were several German prisoners around and I chose one that seemed the right height to lean upon and off we started again. The wound was stiff and painful, and I found walking difficult, but I felt that the sooner we were out the better. We had come to peaceful waters again and the way ahead seemed clear. We had not gone far when

Digitized by Google

it occurred to Lange that he might get three other Germans, and the four could carry me out, and full of his idea he hurried back. Five minutes elapsed and the German gunners took it into their heads to barrage the track, and a row of shells dropped one by one ahead and behind. My prisoner assistant and I stood inside a broken concrete pill box and waited. The shells still came, and no sign of Lange. An awful thought pressed itself on my brain that he had been hurt, and his appearance a few minutes later was a huge relief. The four Germans carried a stretcher easily; they were well-built, dapper little men, and kept step together, as if on a drill ground. And high up on their shoulders I went down the road to the Advanced Dressing Station.

On each side were the guns in rows still blazing away; I caught sight of some gunners stripped to the waist. By now the Battalion would be tightening their belts before going through 3rd Otago to their first objective. Half way to the Station one of my Germans stumbled on the dead body of a soldier lying on their path; a blood-vessel had broken on his way out, and all the bearers could do was to tip his body off the stretcher and trudge back for others.

The Dressing Station was in the Wieltje

Digitized by Google

Dug-out; a biggish affair under ground. There seemed to be a block here. The ammunition lorries must be given precedence and the wounded wait. Things had gone well, and with the guns moving up later in the day shells and more shells were wanted. Prisoners were coming down in considerable numbers. My stretcher slid down the inclined way into the Dug-out and on the damp floor of the dark passage to the Dressing Room I waited in company with a dozen others. Cocoa was given to us and it was explained that we must wait until the lorries had returned and the motor ambulances could get up. This gave Lange an opportunity to come down and say good-bye. I did not like leaving him behind to it all, but I should be back in a few weeks and in the meantime he could look after my things, including "Billy" the dog. None of the wounded spoke, only one murmured, and he was injured in the head and unconscious. However, it did not seem long before our stretchers moved up one by one, and by the process of elimination mine eventually got there. The dressing had again come off, and Captain Kemp applied another, altered the description of my hip wound on the ticket and, with a cheery word, moved me on. Another wait when the

Digitized by Google

A.D.M.S., who happened to pass, assured me I had a typical "Blighty," and then once more out into the light and on to an ambulance. Since I had been under ground a German shell had burst on the side of the road opposite the mouth of the Dug-out and killed and wounded several.

A visit to the Corps dressing station, where we lay around on our stretchers and had more cocoa and were interviewed by several rather lugubrious Padres, and then on to an ambulance again and so to the Canadian Casualty Clearing Station. They had only come up the day before, they said, but it was comfort indeed lying on a bed. I was not undressed as my destination was still further, although the Canadian doctor hummed and ha'd at my head. Finally he decided it was only a scalp wound, and I was marked for the Hospital Train.

The day was going and it was after dark before the train moved out of the siding. I have only one happy recollection of that journey, the plate of hot Army stew for dinner. My clothes were wet through and felt clammy and cold and, lie in whatever position, I could not get comfortable; each move seemed to bring me on top of more of the gear that I was jealously guarding, field glasses, steel helmet, map case and

Digitized by Google

stick, for when the stretcher-bearers had been hit in the early morning, Lange had been obliged to jettison most of my impedimenta. The wound was stiff now. However, everything has its end. Thoughts of Calais, Dover and London as a happy itinerary occurred and recurred during that long night, but we left the railway yards of Calais and then Boulogne behind and at two in the morning halted at Etaples. A motor journey in the cold mist, another wait in the receiving room of the Hospital to have further additions made to one's ticket, and then along the duck-walked covered way to the ward. And there the prison doors closed upon me; two weeks in France, seven weeks in London, and five months at Walton-on-Thames, and now in a Convalescent Home.

It has been a queer experience, and I am not sure that it has not been the queerest of all of the last three years. I entered into what is a different world. A Hospital is a thing apart from anything else, and now that one has passed through its régime, I feel that one would face it better and with less discomfort were one called upon to do so again. It has its laws, written and unwritten, mostly the latter, and they cannot be learned in a day. Moreover, the

Digitized by Google

opportunity of learning them beforehand has gone when you become a patient, for there is no teacher but experience, and in a Utopian Army all soldiers would be lectured by competent Instructors on "Life in Hospital."

It is an opinion generally held that the moment a patient is undressed and snuggles in between the cool white sheets of his ward bed, his troubles are ended; he no longer has any responsibilities, he has cast them upon the Doctors and Nurses. Of a truth his duties have only begun, and no one has more need of coolness, judgment and a sound philosophy than the sick man entering the gates of a Hospital. Unfortunately, his very state often robs him of the qualities he most needs, but none the less they are required, and very much so. Coolness and self-control are the most valuable of them all in the peculiar circumstances. Wounds seem unlike diseases; they do not run the same definite course; a wounded man has his ups and downs, and must simply face each day as it comes. He must not be content, either, with that limitation; even within the twenty-four hours it is of no use anticipating trouble. "Don't worry, and keep quiet," are not bad instructions. With pain and sleeplessness, the more restless

Digitized by Google

you are the worse they become ; lie perfectly still, and you baulk them to some extent. To a sick man, trouble stares him in the face —not troubles of the present, but ghostly ones that threaten him in the immediate future, and few of them materialize.

In one's healthy days the idea of staying in bed for a week was horrible, and yet many men are staying in bed for months, and are cheerful and almost happy. The truth is there is hardly any limit to the power of adaptation to circumstances that we possess. Among my varied experiences was to lie spread-eagle fashion on a double abduction Thomas' splint for seven weeks. I could only move my arms and wriggle my toes, and still the seven weeks went, although I must frankly admit their memory, if I allow myself to dwell on it, is as of some horrible thing. I am not quite sure why, but I fancy the anticipation of what it would be like, has overruled in my brain the impression the time actually made upon me. Six weeks in a plaster cast like the sarcophagus of a mummy were far more jovial. The cast and I could lie on either side at an angle of thirty degrees, and we went for rides in a spinal chair. When I discarded it and its lining of cotton wool, the bed seemed very hard and inhospitable.

Digitized by Google

The days pass quickly enough in hospital, there is so much to do. The nights are slower, but in a large ward there is always something going on, even after the lights are out. During the first week or two, when temperatures run high, men have queer dreams; perhaps they are something more than dreams, for they are very real. Every night I was a Field Ambulance and had to march from one place to another in France —a day's march. I was the whole Unit; so many hundred men, equipment, horses, vehicles, etc. I had little knowledge of the organization of the Medical Corps, which made my task no easier, and the worry and anxiety I experienced every night were indescribable; the sensation of having so many Egos was in itself fantastic. To a man who cannot sleep, the early call for washing—4 a.m. in France—is welcome, and the cup of tea nectar. There we were a friendly party, all on intimate terms with each other. It was a long hut, with beds close together, and only a narrow passage in the middle.

Different men face the pain and confinement in different ways; the more highly-strung find it hard, very hard, but the great majority of those I met were brave, patient philosophers. Many of them had not only

Digitized by Google

their present to endure, but a maimed and dislocated future to face. I do not remember hearing one of them grumble at his luck, and some of them had every reason to curse their fates in their hearts. Some had to undergo operation after operation, and often they were the ones whom the anæsthetic upset so much for days after. One cannot help pitying the limbless men, who feel a dull ache in the lost part for weeks after the amputation—a harsh reminder of their loss.

There are some who find it difficult coming in from the field, where they have been surrounded by men of whom they have been in command, to be controlled by the other sex, whose duty it now is to look after them. The sisters and nurses naturally like doing their work in their own way, and the soldiers have grown accustomed to insisting on everything being done as they ordain. It takes time to become adjusted to the new conditions and adds a little to the irksomeness of the life. There are others who, with open treason and I am sure secret shame, declare they prefer men nurses; that women are ruled by their feelings, and a deep and intuitive sympathy is not general in the sex. Unless they like a patient, these iconoclasts say, some nurses are as graven

Digitized by Google

images. Of course this is heresy, and the very heretics will give you the names of patient, kind women who grudge the least thing undone to make their patients comfortable. However, there are undoubtedly women who are unsuited for nursing, just as there are doctors who were never destined for their profession. It is the same with the men orderlies; some should not have been allowed near a Hospital; there are others whose steady, sure hands seem to know instinctively how pain can be avoided and where ease lies.

The day when I was to be allowed up, at last, was to be a red-letter one, but I went through a certain amount of tribulation before getting up was any pleasure. Habit had so possessed me that there was no great inclination to make the effort, and it was necessary to learn to walk all over again. But day by day it was easier, and I think every day one was a little more grateful that there was still happiness in the open air and in the power of movement. Lange, who had been badly gassed and invalided to England, was now on the Hospital Staff in my ward, and helped me to get about.

I was fortunate in having a visitor who came every day, once I reached England, and for whose arrival at visiting hours I

Digitized by Google

eagerly looked. Many men had no one and felt their loneliness. The New Zealand War Contingent Association has organized its visiting well, and even in the Hospitals in more or less remote corners of England our men are sought out by its official visitors. Also the policy of our Government has been sound in providing our own General Hospitals at Walton-on-Thames, at Codford and at Brockenhurst. I have a firm belief in the policy of mixing together men from all parts of the Empire; apart from other things, it is for our benefit coming from an island in the Antipodes. But I hold the opinion that when a man is wounded he requires moral assistance as well as medical skill and nursing. The injury is a shock to his nerve and mentality, and he wants petting and spoiling to help him up again. And this is what we get in our own Hospitals. My arrival at Walton on the 3rd December, to me, was a home-coming. I was amongst my own people again, familiar faces, familiar talk and kindness indescribable. The curious medley of horror and happiness in my memory of the months in Hospital contains a deep and sincere gratitude for the care I received at Walton.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV

THE NEW ZEALANDER

ALTHOUGH the New Zealanders are the youngest branch of the family, their three score years and ten of vigorous, healthy life have stamped them with a separate Nationhood. Their grandfathers were of a sturdy type that readily faced, with their wives and families, the discomforts and dangers of a three months' voyage in what were not very much more than fishing smacks, to the furthermost part of the world, and there fought with Nature for a living. Many of them eventually found themselves engaged in a bloody struggle with the Maori inhabitants, lasting for several years. Such men and women were the forbears of what is a proud and brave race to-day.

For many years past, New Zealand has been enriched with a steady stream of selected immigrants from the United Kingdom and, in smaller numbers, from the

Digitized by Google

Continent. Whether it is due to the climate or the democratic liberty of a young country it is difficult to say, but the new-comers soon absorb its virility and independence. Still, it would be hardly right not to say the New Zealand Division contains many who really call themselves by the name of the country they had left but a few years ago to emigrate to New Zealand. And, moreover, we are indebted to a good many English Imperial Officers, who were on loan to the Dominion when war broke out, or have been attached to the Division since.* But the Dominion of New Zealand is represented in the Division now in France, and in the characteristics of its members are seen those of the Young Race.

Some cynics affirm that earnestness is incompatible with a sense of humour. A sense of humour is undeveloped in the young, and as races are only collections of individuals, it may be that we have no great fund of that happy trait. And that is more probably so because the New Zealander is certainly earnest. He has a keenness and an earnestness that will always

* The Commandant of the N.Z.E.F., Lieutenant-General Sir Alexander Godley, and its Chief Executive Officer in England, Brigadier-General G. S. Richardson, both came from the Regular Army.

Digitized by Google

carry him through. At school, and later in life, it was that type of fellow that succeeded. He was often not very companionable, and did not seem to have much fun, but he attained his goal. There was an element of robust solidity about him.

With other Colonials, the New Zealanders share the faculty of retaining their balance whatever happens: they are always masters of the situation. The man who, in spite of "alarums and excursions," can say, "Oh, that's nothing," and carry on, is a strong man and a leader. As a matter of fact, nearly all our men are leaders. It is a remarkable thing, the capacity for leadership in the rank and file. In my own Company, promotion to non-commissioned rank went by seniority if the next on the list were reasonably fitted for it, and very few indeed missed their turn when it came. Almost without exception, the New Zealander possesses the gift of leadership that enables him to fill the hardest position in the British Army—the man who is of the rank of Private with the appointment of Lance-Corporal. My respect goes whole-heartedly to the non-commissioned officer, and especially to the Lance-Corporal. He lives with his section, they have been his greatest pals, and now

Digitized by Google

he is to rule them. His word must be law, and it is only by sheer force of character that he can do it. Unless he is the leader and has the capacity for governing men, his is an impossible task. The truth is, in New Zealand, democracy is a real thing. With compulsory primary education, free secondary education liberally granted, and university education within the reach of the scholarship winner and of the sons of men of moderate means, the rising generation of the Dominion is well educated, and the ordinary citizen is under no disadvantage as compared with his social superior in that respect. Further, its population is small, and, figuratively speaking, everyone knows each other. The consequence is class distinctions are few. This nurtures the seed of independence and gives all ranks a confidence that serves them in such good stead when their turn for promotion comes. A man's social position or occupation in civil life has counted for little in the selection of officers in the field, as far as the New Zealand Division is concerned. A young farm hand and a house painter made two of the most gallant and efficient officers I knew. They were selected because they were senior in service and had made good non-commissioned officers. Perhaps the Commander's task is made easier by the

Digitized by Google

men themselves, who are by nature orderly. They have inherited the deference to law and order that distinguishes the Old Race.

I have heard Imperial Officers on service in New Zealand express astonishment at the rapidity with which our men absorb instruction. They rather wondered whether it might not be forgotten just as quickly, but there is no doubt knowledge is easily attained. It may be a native inquisitiveness has something to do with it; they seem to want to know all about their surroundings, and to have the intelligence to grasp the situation. A certain mental restlessness will not leave them content with only sufficient information to carry out their duties; they find out more. Our Military Police, perhaps, are typical of this trait. They generally know more than what is happening at their own Cross Roads. "They possess a directness of vision, and what the Americans call 'horse sense,' a practical grasp of realities."*

As to physique, there are hot arguments whether our firm friends, the Australians, are not bigger men than we are, and the first 100,000 Americans looked huge fellows, but undeniably the average New Zealander is of

* *Evening Standard.*

Digitized by Google

fine physique, and would have little excuse if he were not the excellent rifle shot and the untiring worker with the spade that he is. Perhaps it is his physique that makes him generally cheerful under all conditions. He is seldom out of temper; really more like a big school-boy. One can carry the analogy of the young nation and the youth of its characteristics too far, but it is curious that, like youngsters, our men are not wonderfully tidy and neat as a rule. It is many months before they develop the soldierly carriage one sees in the well-trained British Line Regiments, and I doubt whether they take such a pride in their personal appearance as the "Tommy" does. Again they are a little shy of endeavouring to salute with the vim shown by the English soldiers: it is not because they are less anxious to show respect to their officers, for I am sure their rather gauche salute conveys a genuine compliment, but they are afraid of appearing conspicuous and making fools of themselves. In quarters and trenches they are clean to a degree, but they have no great desire to make things look well, and there is consequently no incentive in their minds to go to extra trouble to attain extreme uniformity. I am not sure they have not a silent contempt for the "spit and polish" theory,

Digitized by Google

which is really very necessary in military life.

But they are brave fellows: quiet men with a big share of self-respect and self-restraint. If every nation must be given a national vice, most of our men would sell their souls for football, and a little gamble at "two up," or "crown and anchor," is a strong temptation to them. I could never bring myself to think very harshly of these two games. The life of a private soldier is largely without hobbies or amusements. Reading is almost out of the question, even to those who find it a pleasure; football is not open to them every day; concerts soon tire and cinema theatres are scarce. The "two up" ring is their billiard room or bridge table, and they require something of the kind: to a man who has given up a comfortable mode of living and perhaps has left behind a wife and family, unless he is consumed with ambition to rise in his new sphere, the life at the front cannot be anything but uninviting. He lives under the conditions of a "swagger" or "tramp," although he does not have that gentleman's privacy, he has no change of clothes, and sleeps in everything he wears. Lice are always with him, and the immediate future contains nothing to which he may look

Digitized by Google

forward with eagerness. And yet I believe the men who really need our sympathy are few. The spark of ambition is in most of us, and the Private hopes for the proud day when he will be a Lance-Corporal. He has a future. Moreover, there is a magnetism about the life one cannot describe. It is a school-boy existence in many ways: men like boys are attractive people to live with, and the comradeships formed on active service are as strong as any in history. The very conditions, too, have an extraordinary way of bringing out the best in men, and selfishness is simply an impossibility. I doubt if many of the ones who are fortunate enough to come through unscathed will ever regret the months they spent in the Army.

The training and experience will prove, in the majority of cases, a great benefit. This war is not like the South African War. Discipline is its mainspring, and obedience to law and order has been unhesitating, because all reasonable men realize the times call for it. Method is another plank of the Army platform, and, above all, a monotonous insistence upon everything being done in the best possible way. Slipshod work is anathema, and it is precisely these three qualities that a young independent nation

Digitized by Google

patriotism within him, and that Fate has given him the opportunity to do his share for the Dominion and the Empire; and that Pride goes far to make him the gallant soldier that he is.

THE END

Printed at The Chapel River Press, Kingston, Surrey.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Princeton University Library
32101 059983732

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google